

THE
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THE COUNTY.

CHAPTER XXI.

OUR NEXT MEETING.

THEN begins a purgatory for me.

When I had thought Allan at the other end of the world it was comparatively easy to go through my daily round, to write letters and busy myself with household affairs—for we have scarcely had time to shake down into the usual routine of a well-ordered household—to go for a constitutional at twelve o'clock, and for a drive or ride at half-past two, coming back to tea with no greater excitement to agitate me than the prospect of a new novel, or of a little mild village gossip.

But how am I to endure these trivialities when I am torn in pieces with fear and joy at the thought of meeting my lost love? How can I listen to the housekeeper's babble about the wicked ways of Monsieur Dubois, the *chef*, who makes surreptitious love to her maidens the moment her broad back is turned? How can I feign sufficient interest in the nicknacks for completing the drawing-rooms which are sent by cartloads from London for my inspection?

How can I pretend to care whether I ride Bonny Bess to-day and Bluebell to-morrow, or Bluebell to-day and Bonny Bess to-morrow, when at every crunching of wheels in the drive I turn hot and cold by turns; when at every ring of the door-bell I lose all control over my shaking voice; and when even the sight of the postman makes the end of my sentences fly out of my head?

'Wouldn't you like to go away for a week or two?' asks Frances,

one morning when I am pulling my needle idly through a piece of embroidery, having been even more restless than usual since breakfast, wandering aimlessly from room to room, from my writing-table to the piano, and from the piano to the conservatory, where I have plucked half-a-dozen flowers and then carelessly thrown them aside.

I drop my work and stare angrily at Frances. I am very tenacious of my dignity just now, and have not mentioned Allan's name since the day I met Mrs. Stuart.

'Go away!' I repeat severely. 'Why should I want to go away from home?'

'You are not looking at all well, and I think you want a change,' returns my sister boldly.

'A change, when we have been roaming for months! My dear Frances, I think it is a rest and not a change I want.'

'It would be so nice to have a week or two in town and do the plays,' says Frances coaxingly. 'Do ask Bryan to take us up. This frost will stop the hunting for longer than that.'

'And miss the Brackham Ball!' I exclaim, scanning her curiously. 'Really, Frances, you are too absurd.'

And I march stiffly away to escape a further discussion which might lead to sore topics.

There is something behind this solicitude for me, I feel sure. Frances is not so afraid of my making a scene, or otherwise misconducting myself, when I meet Allan Vaudrey as to be willing to forego the delight of disporting herself at the Brackham Ball in the new gown she has specially ordered for the occasion.

'What can she be driving at?' I wonder, as Julie envelopes me in furs, preparatory to my morning walk. 'She cannot seriously imagine that I shall say or do anything foolish.'

But astonishment of Frances' sudden whim is quickly chased out of my preoccupied mind by the weighty problem as to whether I shall walk along the Brackham Road, which leads towards Mrs. Stuart's place, and court the nervous excitement certain to ensue upon the appearance of any biped, quadruped, or wheeled chariot; or whether I shall earn the dull applause of my conscience by pottering righteously upon the road to Fairley in the opposite direction.

Virtue carries the day. I have bolstered myself so assiduously with good resolutions during the last forty-eight hours, and have laid down so many rules for my own guidance, that a premeditated

lapse into doing those things which I ought not to do, with such small temptation, would be weak indeed. Thinking things which I ought not to think is another matter; and I am not half way to the Fairley lodge before I find myself calculating how long I have been out of the house, and consoling myself with the fact that if anyone comes while I am away the servants are sure to say that Frances is at home.

'I will walk as far as the cross roads,' I exclaim aloud, giving myself an angry shake, 'and I will inquire for Mrs. Morgan at the lodge into the bargain.'

How cold it is! One must almost run to keep warm. Not a morning this on which to dawdle lazily along, leaning on gates and sitting on stiles at every convenient opportunity; a morning rather on which to make a record mile, and announce triumphantly at lunch that one was not twenty minutes between the two mile-stones.

'I will inquire for Mrs. Morgan on my way home,' I decide, as I march rapidly past the lodge. 'I will get my walk over first.'

Br—r! How sharp the air is, and how firm the ice by the roadside! We shall have skating soon, I expect. And with the touch of the ice under my feet there rises in my mind the nauseating recollection of the last time I skated—on Sir Joseph Yarborough's flooded meadow, the day I promised to marry Bryan.

'It is no use looking back!' and I twist my hands impatiently in my muff. 'As I have made my bed so must I lie on it. Oh, most cheering of proverbs! There, when I turn that corner by Hackett's Wood, the cross roads will be in sight.'

I turn the corner with a swing, panting to reach my boundary and then set homewards again, though I am all the while feebly endeavouring to propitiate my self-respect by reminding it that I generally do walk fast in frosty weather. I rush round the sign-post, which stands at the angle of the road, and there, not twenty yards off, coming slowly towards me, is Allan Vaudrey. I stop suddenly, and all the blood in my body seems to fly painfully to my face; but nevertheless my greedy eyes take in every detail of him as he dawdles along, absently flicking a dead bramble off the end of his cane. How changed he is! How drawn his face! Surely it must be the black clothes which make him look so thin—and at the sight of that dark livery of woe a sharp pang of pity strikes through me. Poor fellow! He has been in the grim company of death.

My pause in the middle of the road attracts his attention and he looks up. His listless attitude disappears as if by magic, and he comes firmly towards me, his face set and hard.

'Good morning, Mrs. Mansfield,' he says, without the least embarrassment. 'Mrs. Stuart was just going to bring me to call upon you.'

I look up at him, and to my horror, to my infinite disgust, my voice sticks obstinately in my throat and I cannot get out a word. The sight of that dear face which I have so unutterably longed for has completely taken away my self-possession, and I can only gaze mutely at him—all my wrongs, all my tutored calmness totally swallowed up in the unreasoning delight of beholding him once more. But I am to be rudely restored to a proper sense of the *status quo*.

'I am afraid you have forgotten me,' says Allan, with a cool sneer; 'and yet it is not so very long ago since we met.'

Pride may be one of the seven cardinal sins, but surely upon this occasion it comes to my aid in guise of virtue. What right has he to speak to me in that contemptuous tone?

'I have not forgotten you in the least, Sir Allan,' I return, with sudden *aplomb*; 'and, by the way, I must congratulate you upon your new honours.'

'The congratulations ought to come from me, I think,' he answers quickly. 'I hear you have everything which the soul of a woman can desire.'

And so we glare angrily at one another. We have not even shaken hands; mine are trembling violently inside my muff, and he has made no movement towards that conventional sign of friendship.

'You said something about Mrs. Stuart,' I remark at last, shifting uneasily under his wrathful eyes. Good heavens! that Allan Vaudrey's eyes should ever look at me with that expression, as if I were some vile, abominable thing!

'She is in that little cottage just round the corner,' he answers, waving his stick vaguely behind him. 'She has gone in to see an old servant who lives there, and will drive along presently to pick me up.'

'Then, as you are both coming to Milbourne, we may as well turn and walk that way,' I say hesitatingly.

It is no desire to be in his company that inspires my proposition; though I have not been five minutes with him, it is clear

as sunlight to me that we were not farther apart when he was in another hemisphere. But he and Mrs. Stuart were evidently coming to luncheon, and I view hospitality as sacredly as any Arab.

So we pace awkwardly homewards side by side.

I am tongue-tied again while the memory is thrilling through me of the last time we walked together—to Riverdale Station just before his father died. With that odd sense of trifles which pervades all my mental woes, I am nearly as much occupied with the lugubrious effect of his black clothes as with his altered demeanour. It makes me realise so forcibly that this is not Allan Vaudrey, my gay, light-hearted, easy-going lover, but a man who has seen much trouble, is full of care, and weighted with heavy responsibilities.

So it falls to him to make conversation.

‘How is Mr. Mansfield?’ he begins, with happy choice of subject, for is it not right and seemly that he should evince the usual polite anxiety as to the well-being of my lord and master?

‘Quite well, thank you.’

‘And your sister?’

‘Quite well, thanks.’

‘She is staying with you, I hear.’

‘Living with me,’ I correct. ‘Of course my home is Frances’ too.’

A pause, which Sir Allan apparently employs in cudgelling his brains for something stinging.

‘You were wise to return to Loamshire,’ he remarks presently with bitter emphasis. ‘It evidently suits you; I have never seen you looking so well and flourishing.’

The colour which has been burning in my cheeks since I first caught sight of him deepens at this, but I make no reply. It hurts me to wrangle with him, and I wonder miserably within myself why he has come to see me if he cannot speak more kindly. If we were to fall to reproaching one another, surely it is I who ought to have the most to say.

The crunching of wheels on the gravel drive behind us is a welcome sound, and when Mrs. Stuart pulls up her cobs she is hailed with that fictitious warmth usually accorded to a third party by two combatants.

‘Has Sir Allan broken the news that we are going to invade you for lunch?’ she calls out in her loud, cheery tones; ‘or has he been too occupied with making himself agreeable to mention so prosaic a fact?’

'He really has not made himself particularly agreeable,' I answer, as I hurl myself into the seat beside her, leaving Sir Allan to scramble up with the groom behind.

'It is a shame of you to say that, Mrs. Mansfield,' he declares, bending forward and speaking in the same jeering tone, 'when I have just paid you so pronounced a compliment upon your blooming appearance.'

'And well you might!' says Mrs. Stuart. 'I am certain you have seen nothing half so sweet since you left your native shores—how long ago?'

But Sir Allan makes no rejoinder, unless turning and telling the groom to put the brake on be taken as a polite dissent from her amiable sentiments.

CHAPTER XXII.

VISITORS.

As we enter the house we find Frances lounging over the hall fire, and even in the midst of my own suppressed agitation I am struck by the pale face she turns towards us, while her big blue eyes dilate as excitedly at the sight of Sir Allan Vaudrey as if it were a quondam lover of her own who had suddenly made his appearance.

Their greeting is effusive in the extreme, a fact which somewhat surprises me, for the moment, as they never used to be over polite to one another. However, I might have known that well-invested millions constitute a claim upon respect which Frances would be the last person to ignore; and Sir Allan for his part will apparently embark upon a new estimate of her character on the ground that her vices have originated in proximity to me, whereas her virtues must be all her own.

'Your house is charming, positively charming,' declares Mrs. Stuart. 'You always had exquisite taste, and I suppose it has been given free play. What delicious old leather! May I have a peep at the other rooms before lunch?'

And so she carries me off, whispering as soon as we are out of earshot, 'It *was* Frances who was his ancient flame, was it not? I used always to try and find out, but he had a very baffling way of pretending to admire you both, while decidedly giving me the impression that it was Frances whom he preferred. I think it is

most *empressé* on his part to come about her so quickly after getting his money; and you know it was at his own hint that I asked him to stay with me just now—though indeed I am always delighted to have him!’

‘That is the morning room and this is the white library,’ I answer, with inapposite stiffness; ‘which will you see first?’ And I walk into the library without waiting for a reply.

‘Delightful! Too delightful! One becomes a long note of admiring exclamation in looking at your rooms. And what period is this? It *is* a period, I am sure, because it all looks so quaint and out of the common. Ah! How pleased you would be to see Frances settled down near you in just such another house as this! He would have to buy a place in one of the habitable counties, of course, for she would never dream of living at that terrible barn of old Sir Joshua’s near the business.’

‘Don’t you think we are getting on a little too fast?’ I inquire, endeavouring vainly to infuse some jocosity into a voice which only sounds indignant.

‘Oh, I don’t know! When the two parties “are willin’” everything else follows so quickly nowadays.’

I don’t think Mrs. Stuart can have improved lately. Her voice used surely not to be so loud and harsh; and her features look quite coarse in the morning light. She always was in the habit of calling a spade a spade, but I really consider it positively indelicate the way her imagination is running riot to-day.

‘Well, you must have spent a mint of money,’ she concludes, as I pilot her back to the inner hall, where Frances, in one of her most fetching attitudes, is leaning against the high back of a carved oak chair, and making eyes at Sir Allan.

‘Poetry!’ cries Mrs. Stuart. ‘Now, it is no use denying it; my ears are sharp. You were quoting some tender lines to that young man, Miss Frances.’

‘They weren’t *very* tender,’ returns Frances, with another arch *œillade*; ‘but Sir Allan is so modest that I don’t fancy he would like me to repeat them.’

‘Ha, ha!’ laughs Sir Allan. ‘Yes, say them again, Miss Frances, do.’

The hard look has gone from his face, and he is beaming genially under Frances’ blandishments. It is positively painful how even the best of men like talking about themselves, and my sister on the war-path has but two themes, herself and himself,

capable, indeed, of much preluding and endless variations, but ever hovering around the engrossing topics.

‘How much a dunce that has been sent to roam
Excels a dunce that has been kept at home,’

quotes Frances, on being thus pressed. ‘R-o-a-m, the poet means—not the capital of Italy; r-o-a-m, which may imply India or any other appropriate place.’

‘H’m! I call your verses very tender,’ declares Mrs. Stuart. ‘What do you say, Mrs. Mansfield?’

‘I don’t read much poetry, so I am not a fair judge,’ I return coldly.

‘Mrs. Mansfield rises superior to the foolish twitterings of the bards,’ says Sir Allan mockingly, and Frances chimes in—

‘She always was a practical little soul, weren’t you, darling?’

The noise of the luncheon-gong prevents any further analysis of my character, and Bryan appears at the same moment.

The greeting between Allan Vaudrey and my husband is of the most cursory, though I notice a red flush mount to Allan’s forehead as they shake hands—for Mrs. Stuart immediately absorbs all Bryan’s attention.

He did not know her before, but she has a masonic ‘hail-fellow-well-met’ manner with men which in two minutes establishes her in their innermost affection.

She is a peer’s daughter too, and what well-constituted British mind is indifferent to that halo?

‘It is really kind of you to come and see us in this sociable way,’ I overhear Bryan expatiating to her at a very early stage of lunch. ‘I must say that most of my wife’s old friends have not received her as cordially as she had a right to expect.’

Mrs. Stuart’s voice is not so audible as usual in reply. She is apparently disconcerted at this unexpected confidence, and mumbles something confusedly about county people being proverbially slow.

‘That, of course, is well known, and most justifiable with regard to strangers,’ agrees Bryan with impartial severity, ‘but it ought not to apply in Esmé’s case. Her birth and my means deserve a more decided recognition.’

‘Ah, but do we ever get our deserts in this world? I doubt it,’ rejoins Mrs. Stuart cheerfully—it would take more than even Bryan is capable of to put her out of countenance for long. ‘Look at me, for instance. I am sure that I *deserve* the stud of a

potentate of the turf, and here I am beginning the hunting season with one elderly nag.'

'Then I hope you will allow me to have the pleasure of mounting you occasionally,' says Bryan, exactly as if he were offering her a glass of water. 'We will inspect the stables after lunch, and you can choose your own animal.'

Mrs. Stuart is oftener on the back of some one else's steed than her own, and does a good bit of horse-broking in a quiet way by riding dealers' horses, and getting them sold in consequence of their wonderful achievements under her clever manipulation. I have also known her accept mounts at the hands of widely-varying individuals, from the Master down to sporting farmers—but I don't think she will take one from Bryan.

'It is most kind of you, Mr. Mansfield, to think of such a thing, but please don't mention the subject again. I was only joking, of course, and I ride my husband's horses when I have none of my own.'

Having thus extricated herself, Mrs. Stuart steals an awkward glance at me, to find out whether I am listening to this pleasing conversation, and is much relieved to see that, to all appearance, I am absorbed in the account Frances is giving Sir Allan of Riverdale society.

'Yes, I dare say there were some decent people within reach—within ten miles, for instance,' she is saying; 'but then you see Sir Joseph did not care to have anything to do with them. No disinterested person would assume the grovelling attitude which he expects from his fellow-beings, so of course he is dependent upon the village for society.'

'Well, at any rate, you have done with him now, I suppose,' returns Sir Allan, half inquiringly.

'Yes, indeed; my fondest hope is never to set eyes upon him or any other Riverdalian again,' says Frances calmly.

I flush with shame at her heartlessness and want of nice feeling in speaking so contemptuously of Sir Joseph before other people; whatever his failings may be, he has been very good to her.

'Then your fondest hope is doomed to disappointment,' I cry hotly. 'I have always intended to write and ask the Yarboroughs to come and stay with us as soon as we are settled.'

'I believe I have heard you say so,' answers my sister coolly; 'but before that letter is posted there will be a pitched battle

royal between your high and mightiness and your humble servant. Why, you will be asking Uncle Frank and Priestman next !'

'By the way, how are your uncle Frank and Mrs. Nugent ?' asks Sir Allan. 'Do you ever hear anything about them ?'

'Oh yes, no end of stories,' answers Frances, laughing ; 'our new aunt is a clever creature. I always did admire her tact. They say she has made Billington a perfect Temple of the Creature Comforts, with Uncle Frank as deity and herself as high priestess.'

'I can imagine it,' ejaculates Sir Allan, 'and nothing is withheld from the altar, I suppose ?'

'Nothing,' echoes Frances. 'We hear from the servants that the drawing-room reeks of tobacco and that Uncle Frank's Dandie Dinmont sleeps upon the billiard table. They say that odious little cases of liqueur and stands of brandy and soda are stuck about all over the house, so that Uncle Frank may help himself at any moment without the exhausting toil of ringing the bell, and that he lives from one week's end to the other in a dirty old velvet smoking-coat which we took away from him ages ago, and which Priestman unearthed directly they came home from the honeymoon.'

'I don't know why you call the woman clever,' remarks Allan contemptuously ; 'she seems to be leading the life one might expect from a servant turned mistress, and your uncle is letting himself down to her level.'

'Ah, you haven't heard all yet,' cries Frances ; 'she encourages Uncle Frank in his lazy ways, but she is active enough herself. She has gone through a course of theological reading under the auspices of the Brackham dissenting minister—this was after she found out that the vicar's wife didn't mean to call—and has finally become a Plymouth Sister.'

'A Plymouth Sister,' repeats Allan, considerably puzzled ; 'but why ?'

'Far be it from me to impute interested motives to so serious a proceeding,' says Frances ; 'still it strikes one as a curious coincidence that Priestman's conversion should have taken place just as old Lord Sandilands was dying. His cousin, who succeeds to the title, and whose place adjoins Billington, is a rabid Plymouth Brother.'

'Yes, Priestman and the new Lady Sandilands are already hand in glove,' I strike in.

But Allan pays no attention to me. He is gazing contemplatively at Frances. It is scarcely likely that he has come across so radiant a face during his travels in the sun-scorched East, but it is not polite to ignore his hostess so completely as he is doing, even to impress a complexion of lilies and roses and features of child-like sweetness upon his mind.

'Surely you have grown taller since I saw you last, Miss Nugent,' he says suddenly, and I start at my old name from his lips. In the dear old days I used always to be 'Miss Nugent,' and she 'Miss Frances;' but he seems quite callous to the change.

'Do you think so?' she says dubiously. 'One does not grow at nineteen.'

'Nineteen, is it?' asks Sir Allan, bending forward with a smile.

'Still truthfully nineteen,' returns Frances solemnly; 'but I will tell you a secret. Next week it will be twenty—and after that never more than twenty, not if you ask me again in ten years' time.'

'There is nothing like fixing an age and sticking to it,' assents Sir Allan; 'but I think twenty is rather early to begin.'

I crumble my bread impatiently and look out of the window. Sir Allan and Frances are sitting one on each side of me, and, unless I force my way into a conversation where I am evidently not wanted, there is nothing to do but attend to my lunch and listen meekly.

'You are going to the Brackham Ball, of course?' asks Sir Allan presently.

'Of course,' replies Frances. 'Not to go to the Brackham Ball is looked upon in these parts as equivalent to a confession that one is ill either in body, mind, or pocket.'

Then why was she so anxious this morning to go up to town for the next ten days? I wonder. She remembers her own inconsistency before the words are out of her mouth, I think, for she colours a little, and looks up to see if I have noticed her slip.

'Yes, I know that everyone turns out for it,' says Sir Allan. 'I went with you two years ago from Billington, if you remember.' And with the last words he turns and looks at me with a wrathful look.

'If I remember!

'Esmé, what was the price of that brocade stuff in the wall-panels of your boudoir?' asks Bryan across the table. 'Mrs.

Stuart admires these curtains very much, but I tell her they are nothing compared with some of the things about the house. Did not the material I am speaking of cost a guinea a foot?’

‘I really forget what it cost,’ I exclaim, rising suddenly from my seat. Frances is still nibbling biscuits, and Bryan has not finished his cheese, but I cannot sit here any longer. Then, with the quick touch of remorse which always comes over me when I have been rude to my husband, I add more gently, ‘But if Mrs. Stuart takes any interest in it I shall be delighted to show her my boudoir.’

So we adjourn upstairs, Mrs. Stuart and I, Bryan following us. The attraction for him is twofold; he thinks Mrs. Stuart a most delightful woman, and he is as pleased as a child to exhibit his new toy. It has been a positive affliction to him that so few people have as yet been inside his house to be impressed by its splendours.

‘Come into the hall with me,’ says Frances to Sir Allan. ‘You don’t want to stare at brocade which cost a guinea a foot, do you?’

Apparently he does not; and on our return to the hall, half an hour afterwards (having minutely and exhaustively inspected boudoir, bedrooms, corridors, and having only refrained from cataloguing the glories of the lower regions through fear of disturbing the servants at their mid-day carousals), we find him contentedly lounging in one big arm-chair, while Frances, propped up with gorgeous cushions, harangues him from another.

‘More poetry!’ whispers Mrs. Stuart. ‘And you told me before lunch that I was looking too far ahead! My dear, in your place I should be thinking of a suitable gown in which to play the part of mother-sister at the wedding. Now, Sir Allan, I am sorry to rout you out, but we must be going.’

The roan cobs are brought round, and Mrs. Stuart is carefully packed in her pretty phaeton, with foot-muff and fur rug.

‘Good-bye!’ cries Frances from the doorstep, as Sir Allan gets in beside her and Bryan goes off to open the lawn gate. ‘We shall look out for you at Knoke Bridge if the frost breaks by Monday. Good-bye!’

Then dancing up to me as I stand gazing gloomily into the hall fire, she says gaily—

‘I have taken him off your hands beautifully, haven’t I, dear?’

‘You have indeed!’ I respond, and turn ungratefully away.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BILLS.

'I THINK it would not be at all a bad plan to give a ball,' says Bryan reflectively, as he cracks a walnut at dessert that evening.

'A ball!' I exclaim with a start, aroused from a deep reverie in which I have been debating within myself the knotty point as to whether grief for his father and brother has alone sufficed to age Sir Allan Vaudrey's face and draw those weary lines around his eyes. 'Why, what do you want to give a ball for, Bryan?'

'I think it would improve our position,' replies my husband.

'What do you mean by improving our position?' I ask, colouring impatiently.

'I suppose people would be obliged to call upon you afterwards if they came to your ball, would they not?' he inquires. 'Now, Lady Dromore, for instance—if you invited her, she would be obliged to call upon you?'

'Dear Bryan, people never do things like that in the country!' I exclaim, reddening more and more, as much from genuine disgust at the bare notion of my touting for Lady Dromore's patronage, as from annoyance that anyone, though it be only Frances, should hear my husband propose such a thing. 'I could not possibly invite people who have taken no notice of me since my marriage.'

'I don't think it would answer, really, Bryan,' says Frances, not at all hastily, but with cool consideration; she is not half so much shocked at the idea as I am. 'People do that sort of thing immensely in town no doubt, but it would not go down here.'

'You don't think so?' queries Bryan. 'Mrs. Stuart seemed to fancy it would be a good plan.'

'You don't mean to say you asked her?' I cry.

'No, she suggested it. I was explaining to her how very rudely one or two ladies have treated you, and she said, "Why don't you give a ball? It is always a popular thing to do. Once when my brother was electioneering he gave a ball;" and then she went on to tell me some anecdotes about the people who came to it, but I did not think them very funny,' continued the unconscious Bryan.

'For Heaven's sake do impress upon him that if he really wants

to "improve our position," says Frances, mimicking Bryan's voice as we make our way to the drawing-room, 'he must first learn to hold his tongue.'

'You can hint it delicately to him if you like,' I reply; 'I am sick of finding fault.'

'It is more than my place is worth,' declines Frances, shaking her head. 'He is not too fond of me as it is.'

Having reached the drawing-room, she ensconces herself comfortably in a low chair, and settles her feet lazily upon the fender. Frances has a supreme contempt for the arts of the needle, or indeed for any occupation whatsoever, and manages to combine the *dolce far niente* very satisfactorily with a northern climate.

As I turn to the piano—Schumann's 'Warum?' is running through my head, and it will tally with the questions I should like to put to Fate—my sister stops me.

'You have not told me one word about your meeting with Allan Vaudrey,' she says reproachfully.

'There's nothing to tell,' I answer shortly, and, sitting down, run my fingers over the keys of the piano.

'Well, I suppose you could scarcely rush into one another's arms and exclaim, "My long-lost love!" in Mrs. Stuart's presence,' agrees Frances indifferently.

'Scarcely. But you may as well give us credit for refraining from such a proceeding upon higher moral grounds, seeing that we did not meet in Mrs. Stuart's presence,' I murmur between the notes.

'No?' says Frances, sitting up with suddenly aroused interest. 'How was that?'

'Sir Allan was walking along the road by himself when I met him. Mrs. Stuart was in a cottage.'

And I begin softly—



but I get no farther, for Frances jumps up from her easy-chair, comes swiftly across the room, and lays a firm, detaining hand upon my wrist.

'He was walking by himself when you met him,' she repeats breathlessly. 'What did he say to you? What did you say to him? Quick, tell me before Bryan comes in!'

'Don't be so tragic, Frances!' I exclaim, half laughing, half angry. 'Really, to hear you talk one might imagine that I was the heroine of a French novel! What on earth *should* I say to Sir Allan, and he to me, except "How do you do?"'

'Didn't he refer to—to the last time he met you, and all that?' asks Frances incoherently.

'Not once. And I shall be much obliged'—making sudden demand upon my little stock of dignity—'if you will not imply that I have anything to tell you about Sir Allan Vaudrey which I should not wish Bryan to hear.'

As I make this highly respectable request my husband saunters into the room. There is an annoyed expression on his usually impassive face, and he holds in his hand a lengthy blue document of several sheets riveted together—on the face of it a bill of malignant character.

'Here's that tiresome fellow Curtis bothering me for money when his order isn't half completed,' he says disgustedly. 'I think I had better pitch his account into the fire and settle it that way.'

'But Curtis's order is completed, is it not?' I ask. 'Everything for the drawing-room was finished a month ago.'

'Ah! Well, it is for the drawing-room that he wants his money. He says he has been put to so much expense for "wall decoration, antique and inlaid furniture, and costly materials, out of the ordinary run, and therefore not kept in stock, that he will be most grateful for a remittance to enable him to balance his cash-book!"' quotes Bryan, holding the accompanying letter from him as if hydrophobia might ensue from closer contact.

'That sounds very reasonable,' say I, leaving the piano and joining my husband on the hearthrug; 'and he has executed the order extremely well. What is the total, Bryan?'

'Four thousand five hundred,' replies Bryan.

'What!' I gasp. 'Four thousand five hundred pounds for this one room. It is not possible!'

'I am afraid it is,' returns Bryan; 'but you may just as well look over it and see if the items are correct.'

And, handing me the bill with an air of relief, he drops into

one of Mr. Curtis's easiest chairs, and in ten minutes is napping quietly behind the outspread sheets of the *Field*.

'Good Heavens!' I ejaculate in pious dismay as I survey the hideous row of figures standing against my embroidered velvet curtains.

'Good Heavens!' again, in monotonous horror, as I discover the exaggerated value Mr. Curtis attaches to that old Persian rug in the east window.

"One *escritoire*, Louis XVI., reproduced from own French model, inlaid and mounted to correspond, &c., 315*l*." Shocking! Three hundred guineas for that Brummagem imitation!

"One *chaise longue*, mounted in genuine Louis XVI. brocade, bunches of flowers tied with blue ribbon on coffee-coloured ground, legs hand-made, and inlaid to correspond, 110*l*." Frightful! How can I ever put my feet up on it again?

"One easy-chair, mounted in——"

'You will have the nightmare to-night if you go on like that,' breaks in Frances lazily from the self-same chair. 'What is the use of tormenting yourself over each item? I suppose you knew what "the dem'd total," as Mr. Mantalini says, would be.'

'Indeed I did not!' I cry eagerly. 'I wanted to know the price of each thing as I ordered it, but Bryan laughed so at the idea that I could not get anything satisfactory from Curtis.'

'Well, Bryan can afford it, can't he?'

'I dare say,' I answer, twisting my bill uncomfortably; 'but I don't like spending such a sum of money on furniture when there is so much misery and want in the world.'

'It is good for trade,' says Frances philosophically; 'so it comes to the same thing in the long run.'

'Fifty-seven pounds for the chair you are sitting on,' I murmur reflectively; 'and when I thought of sending that child of Morgan's to the deaf and dumb college to be properly taught, I found I had not money enough to pay for her outfit and entrance fee.'

'But you could have got it from Bryan, could you not?' inquires Frances sharply.

'I did not ask him,' I murmur evasively.

There is no need to tell Frances that I always find it very difficult to get ready money from Bryan, generous though he be in encouraging me to run up bills.

'I cannot understand that amateur pottering about with poor people,' muses Frances aloud. 'I can understand my namesake

of Assisi, who did the thing with professional thoroughness, and literally gave up all that he had to the poor; but if you once begin to spend money on yourself I don't see the difference between paying fifty pounds or five for a chair.' Giving tithes of all a man possesses seems to me the weakest of compromises.'

'But, Frances, it is better than giving nothing,' I remonstrate.

'I don't see any difference,' she repeats. 'It is only putting down so much superfluous cash for the luxury of a quiet conscience.'

Then leaning forward to poke the glowing coals—

'What an economical wife I should be in that respect,' she concludes; 'for I don't mind acknowledging that I have no conscience to be quieted!'

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN SOCIETY.

NEXT morning it is Frances who is restless and fidgety.

I have lapsed into silent thought, and am drearily rehearsing the sharp speeches, and sadly recalling the cruel glances so freely bestowed upon me yesterday by Sir Allan Vaudrey.

'After all, it serves me right for caring two straws how he looks or what he says, now that I am a married woman,' and I pull myself up with strait-laced propriety; but somehow the stays of matrimonial duty do not stiffen my mental back with much efficacy, and presently I find myself again lamenting that Allan could not have given me the kindly greeting of a friend.

'He certainly has improved in wondrous fashion,' says Frances abruptly, pausing in one of her many flittings from window to door, and from room to room, to finger the shaded blue silks of my embroidery. She has deserted her lounge and her cushions this morning, and appears as bitten by the demon of unrest as I was two days ago.

'Who has improved?' I ask listlessly. 'Bryan?'

'Dutiful spouse!' returns my sister with a laugh. 'How right and proper to appropriate the pronoun "he" to Bryan! And how devoted you are becoming to "him!" But it was not your Bryan I was thinking of at that moment—it was Allan Vaudrey.'

And she half turns away, holding up two skeins to the light.

Something jars on me ; a vague suspicion steals over me.

'Oh ! You find Sir Allan Vaudrey improved, do you ?' I inquire sharply. 'Well, there was room for improvement in your opinion of him.'

'Perhaps so,' answers Frances with a regretful sigh. 'But I was so anxious lest you should marry a poor man that I put all his little shortcomings under a microscope.'

'And now that your sisterly anxiety is removed, you see with clearer, juster eyes !' I finish scornfully.

Frances gives an uncomfortable twist of the shoulder nearest me.

'Have I not just said that I think him wonderfully improved ? He is so much quieter and more dignified.'

'It is astonishing how suddenly two millions invest a man with dignity in some people's estimation,' I remark, with an angry jerk of the needle, and turning a wrathful glare upon Frances.

She meets it unflinchingly ; she is not going to yield an inch ; and her steady gaze says more than her words.

'Dear Esmé, you seem annoyed at my praising Sir Allan ; and is it my fancy that you did not like our getting on so well together yesterday ?'

'It is not fancy at all,' I cry. 'I certainly was disgusted to see you hurl yourself at the head of a man whom you have always loaded with abuse.'

'One lives and learns,' observes Frances coolly ; 'and, as to the hurling, I think there was as much on his part as on mine.'

Silence for a while. Various crushing remarks are checked on the tip of my tongue by the determined recollection of those aforesaid matrimonial corsets, and I bend over a ridiculous blue rose, apparently absorbed in the monstrosities of its shading.

'It is not like you to be so dog-in-the-mangery,' says Frances presently, in plaintive, infantine accents ; that particular childish whine is usually reserved for the undoing of the sterner sex, and has certainly never before been assumed for my destruction.

'You have married a rich man yourself, and you are very fond of him now. I am sure you always jump down my throat if I say half a syllable against him—and you begrudge me your—well, your leavings !'

As she puts forth this extraordinary version of the case, the little glass door leading to the terrace is pushed open from outside, and Bryan enters, flushed and panting.

'Mrs. Stuart's groom has just ridden over with a note for you,

Esmé; I took it from him in the stable-yard and ran round the laurel walk with it; I thought you would get it quicker that way.'

He mops his brow—it does not require much exertion to make Bryan hot—and looks around for applause.

'It is sure to be an invitation, you see,' he adds in excited explanation. 'Open it quickly, like a good girl.'

As I take the tiny scissors from my work-basket and cut the flap of the envelope I rummage hurriedly in my mind for some pretext which will prevent me at least from lunching, dining, or partaking of any other feast in the combined company of Sir Allan Vaudrey, Bryan, and Frances; but nothing which would bear investigation occurs to me on the spur of the moment, and I pull out Mrs. Stuart's note, Frances looking over my shoulder with sisterly familiarity.

'Well?' asks Bryan breathlessly.

'Invitation to dinner to-morrow evening,' returns Frances with triumphant brevity.

'Ah—h!' and Bryan draws a long breath of intensest satisfaction.

'I wonder who will be there?' he speculates presently.

'She mentions the Dromores and Mr. Mostyn,' answers Frances, picking up the note as I put it down.

'Just the very people we wanted to meet,' declares Bryan, his cup of delight indeed overflowing. 'Hadn't you better go and answer it at once, Esmé dear; or shall I bring your writing things here?'

'H'm!' I cough dubiously. 'It is very short notice.'

Bryan's face falls.

'So it is,' he says disconcertedly; 'but after all we can't afford to be too particular.'

'There is no doubt that she sent the note over by hand because she got a refusal from someone else by this morning's post,' I continue, 'hope springing eternal in my breast,' though I am genuinely sorry to throw cold water upon Bryan's delight; he is as easily played upon as a child.

'I am afraid it looks like it,' he responds dismally; 'but I *should* like to meet——'

'How can you be so absurd, Esmé?' strikes in Frances angrily. 'Why, Mrs. Stuart distinctly says the whole thing has been got up quickly.'

'It is very easy to say that!' I scoff; 'and——'

'Does she say that?' eagerly exclaims Bryan at the same instant.

‘Of course she does!’ returns Frances. ‘She says she asked one or two people out hunting yesterday, and is sending off to you by the first opportunity.’

Foiled upon this tack, I then suggest, as artfully as in me lies, that Frances and Bryan shall go without me—that it looks a little *empresé* for all three of us to present ourselves the first time we are asked; that I fancy I have a cold coming on; and finally, that it would be kinder not to burden Mrs. Stuart with a superfluous woman in a neighbourhood where the nobler sex is so rare.

But in vain. I am routed all along the line. Bryan refuses to appear without me; Frances points out that I can, if necessary, wear my pansy velvet, which is high to the throat; and both vociferate that Mrs. Stuart has always a crowd of men at her beck and call. So, the next evening we file into Mrs. Stuart’s drawing-room—two white-robed women (the pansy velvet, strange to say, was not required), and one black-garbed man.

A *propos* of those black garments, I, for my part, am heartily grateful for the oft and much-abused fashion which prescribes the self-same evening attire for all mankind—royalty and waiters inclusive. How vastly would my discomfort in society be increased if, in addition to the perpetual anxiety with which I bate my breath at each remark of Bryan’s, I were also tormented with the uneasy consciousness that his trousers were of the wrong material, and his waistcoat three shades brighter than any other man’s!

I am sure, if the sighed-for last century costume were really to come in again, Bryan’s taste in waistcoats would be terribly flrid!

‘So sweet of you to come,’ welcomes Mrs. Stuart. ‘We have been pining for you ever since our last meeting. Haven’t we, Sir Allan?’

‘I beg your pardon,’ says Sir Allan. He is just shaking hands with Bryan, and looks very tall and particularly stiff. ‘I didn’t catch what you said.’

‘I said we had been pining for their society,’ with a sweep of her fan towards us. ‘Of course I meant that I had been pining for Mrs. Mansfield and Miss Nugent, and you for Mr. Mansfield. Far be it from me to make any more compromising statement!’

On a sofa just behind Mrs. Stuart are seated Lady Dromore and Mrs. Westby. They are both perfectly cognisant of my presence. While apparently absorbed in thrilling conversation they have taken in every detail of my gown; they have priced the diamonds of the big crescent in my hair—I am not spattered all over with

odds and ends of brooches, but the few stones I have on will bear inspection—and they are at present occupied with my *balayouse*, which is of real old Mechlin.

‘How d’ do?’ exclaims Mr. Mostyn, starting forward from that chosen spot so mysteriously dear to the masculine heart—the hearthrug. ‘Glad to see you back again.’

The pack of hounds which delight the neighbourhood are Mr. Mostyn’s, and are kept up at his own expense. Holy and righteous is he who spareth his neighbour’s pocket!

But not for this alone is Mr. Mostyn so universally popular. He has never been known to do or say a nasty thing. It may be true that he does nothing but hunt, and rarely says anything at all; still there are occasions when it appears that he is not unconscious of all that goes on around him; and just now, as he stands beside me, twitching his shoulders nervously and racking his brains for conversation, I am fully aware that he means to demonstrate on my behalf as clearly as in him lies.

‘I heard you were out the other day,’ he goes on jerkily, ‘but I didn’t see you.’

‘There was such a mob,’ I respond, glancing over his shoulder in the direction of the door, where Sir Allan is still employed in greeting Frances. I think she must be telling him what trouble she had to get me here, for her eyebrows are arched under her fringe, and her pretty mouth is pursed up in mock tribulation.

‘Yes, it leaked out that the Prince was coming,’ says Mr. Mostyn, standing first on one leg and then on the other.

Dinner is announced, and Lady Dromore sails past on Mr. Stuart’s arm. ‘How do you do?’ she says grudgingly as she passes me, yellow as a guinea and stupid as a turkey.

Allan and Frances are parted now, for to him falls the honour of taking in Mrs. Westby—to such giddy heights will a baronetcy lead one! But Frances catches them up at the dining-room door, and pilots herself into the seat on his left hand.

We are eleven, and Bryan is the odd man. As he drifts uncomfortably in all alone, and stands looking for a vacant place, I draw Mr. Mostyn a little further down the table, and leave a chair for Bryan by him. Mr. Mostyn is the kindest person here.

‘No, I didn’t stay in Paris,’ says Sir Allan, in answer to some remark from Mrs. Westby. ‘I am afraid the charms of Paris are rather thrown away upon me, for I can’t speak French.’

‘Ah, that is a great defect in the education of the modern

Englishman,' sighs Mrs. Westby, wagging her head sorrowfully—and such a plain little head it is to wag! A turnip might envy its roundness and lack of features. 'I do my best to remedy it in the case of my own boys by always talking French to them in their holidays.'

'Awfully good of you to take so much trouble,' replies Allan absently; though my eyes are lifted in appropriate attention to Mr. Mostyn, who is running over the meets for next week, I am perfectly well aware that Allan has been scanning me critically ever since we sat down to dinner. 'It must be a great bore.'

'Not at all,' says Mrs. Westby affectedly. 'I am obliged to keep up my French for the ambassadors, you know.'

'For the ambassadors?' repeats Sir Allan in a puzzled tone. He is evidently wondering much what high diplomatic female has fallen to his lot this evening.

'Yes, it is so necessary to speak French well to put them entirely at their ease!'

'Hawley on Friday and Baker's Mill on Saturday,' finishes Mr. Mostyn. 'Shall you be out on Saturday? We are sure to draw some of the Billington coverts.'

'I don't know,' I reply hesitatingly. 'I have not been near the old place yet.'

'It is naturally very trying for Mrs. Mansfield,' strikes in Bryan, from Mr. Mostyn's left side. 'Billington was so nearly being her own, you see.'

'Oh! er—er.' Mr. Mostyn is not a man of many words, and a sudden conversational attack is apt to find him unprepared; but he means to be civil, and turns half round towards my husband.

'Her father was the eldest brother, you may remember,' continues Bryan explanatorily to the man whose acres run parallel with those of Billington for many a mile, and who was at school and college with my father; 'and if she had only been a boy it would have been all right. Both she and her sister have names that would do just as well for boys—Esmé and Frances. It must have been a great disappointment to them all.'

'Well, *you* ought not to regret it;' and Mr. Mostyn is so pleased with his own joke that he breaks out into a hearty laugh.

'Oh no! I don't regret it, of course,' replies Bryan, with the air of a man who can afford it. 'Land is a poor sort of investment nowadays, and people who have no other resources must go to the wall.'

Mr. Mostyn's property being entirely agricultural, he can scarcely be expected to assent very cheerfully to this proposition.

On the other side of the table Frances has rescued Allan from Mrs. Westby's grip, which, to do that lady justice, was speedily relaxed for an attack upon Lord Dromore, when she found from one or two leading remarks that Allan's heart was not in the right place, and that he was totally indifferent to what the Prince ate for luncheon the other day.

Do my ears deceive me, or do I hear Frances murmuring gently, 'It must be deeply interesting to own a township and works where so many human beings are employed? How much good you will be able to do!'

'You see it is so frightfully difficult in all such cases to give help and improve the condition of these poor people without pauperising them,' returns Allan.

How quickly she has mounted him on his hobby! It is evidently still his hobby, for he has passed two entrées, and has turned round to her with a new alertness in his bearing.

'Of course, of course,' with rapt, upturned countenance and saint-like absorption. 'It is quite a problem of political economy, is it not?'

'Yes,' nods Allan. 'But what do you care about paupers and political economy?' with sudden suspicion. 'I should fancy that neither you nor your sister thought twice about anything but——' And he pauses, uncertain how far his resentment may express itself with due regard to the proprieties.

'Of anything but ourselves, you mean,' sighs Frances, with meekly drooping head.

'Of yourselves and your clothes—and your diamonds,' says Allan bitterly.

Now Frances naturally has no diamonds and I have; therefore I am afraid it is not Frances to whom he is referring. Some intuition of this probably inspires her to reply with gentle humility—

'Yes, it is terrible how one is influenced by habit and—and—one's surroundings! But indeed you wrong me in thinking that I do not care.'

I lose the rest, for Bryan here leans across Mr. Mostyn and me to offer the address of his wine merchant to our host. 'First-rate fellow!' he declares solemnly. 'And a baronet's cousin too!'

(*To be continued.*)

A LOAFING TRIP TO LISBON.

EVERYONE has a bad word for the Bay of Biscay, and we are not at all sure but that it richly deserves all the opprobrium it calls forth. Byron had his poetical fling at it in 'Childe Harold'—

On, on the vessel flies, the land is gone,
And winds are rude in Biscay's sleepless bay;

and scores of other people, of better morality and worse wit than his gin-drinking lordship, have had, and still will have their fling at that 'sleepless bay' in language more or less poetical and profane—chiefly the latter. There is much virtue in that adjective 'sleepless'—more than at first sight appears; there is a warmer personality about it than perhaps even the noble author altogether intended there should be, for if the Bay is sleepless, how much more so are those unfortunates whom it dandles and rocks in wakeful wretchedness in its wild embrace? It was with a blessed sense of convalescence, after a couple of days of buffetting and reeling through the tumults of Biscay's Bay, that we felt the good ship slide on an even keel into the level waters of the roadstead of Caril, and heard the ceaseless hum and throb of the screw cease at last and leave behind it a very Sabbath of silence. It was five o'clock in the morning when we dropped anchor off Caril, and the August dawn promised us a cloudless day of pitiless heat. Like an ancient galleon, all a-fire, the great sun blazed and burned where he lay in the east on the edge of the distant Spanish hills. There was a penetrating freshness in the air, and, a little inland, wraiths of pale mist still haunted the marshes, momentarily fading into nothingness as the day drew on. Down by the beach the white houses and wharves of the tiny Spanish town straggled about irregularly in what is complimentarily termed a picturesque confusion. Even the laggards of the place prevailed upon themselves to leave their beds an hour earlier when the word went round that we—the weekly steamer—had arrived. All the boats were chartered and filled with crowds of holiday-makers in their best and brightest clothes and spirits; and some of the kerchiefs which were looped and knotted about some of those swarthy heads were things to make you catch your breath and seek to shield

your outraged Northern sense of colour behind the protection of an umbrella. When all the boats were brimful of jubilant passengers and there was no more room for any one of the crowd which still thronged and clamoured on the wharf, they were slowly rowed across the bay towards us and emptied their streams of picnickers on our decks. The inundation did not cease till the afternoon, when, after a farewell ovation in honour of a party of Spanish emigrants who with their children and wives and bundles and mattresses were bound for South America, the town of Caril withdrew from our decks, as voluble and gay and good-humoured as ever, and betook themselves home in a legion of boats with a noisy accompaniment of shouting and gesticulation and laughter. Then, after slinging on board several sprawling bullocks, we hove anchor and stood out to sea, leaving the little port to an afternoon siesta, all the more grateful after its morning's excitement.

At Vigo, our next halting-place, we paused a moment on our way south. We found it a town several sizes larger than Caril, several shades dirtier, several degrees busier. The houses grew up steeply from the edge of the bay, and seemed in imminent danger of losing their balance and toppling down into the water, 'a consummation devoutly to be wished,' for they would be all the cleaner for their ducking. Returning the compliment which Caril had paid us, we hailed a boatman and promised him a 'silver penny' if he would row us ashore and bring us off again after we had stretched our legs on Spanish ground. In those days we knew nothing of the depth and the guile of the Spaniard, suspected nothing, and went trustfully ashore, never dreaming but the fare from the shore back to the ship would be that charged from the ship to the shore, to wit, a modest fourpence. Nothing of the kind, if you please; for when it came to getting aboard again at the shrill summons of the steamer's whistle, we discovered that the boat tariff had increased sevenfold in our brief absence, and that in short the wily Spanish waterman was resolved to trade on our necessity. There was nothing for it but a grumbling submission, and the production of the two halferowns which was the price demanded; and we were even deprived of the consolation of abusing the fellow for his piracy by our ignorance of his tongue; we could only shake a threatening fist and frown into his truculent smiling visage. On first coming ashore we found the quay dense with idlers in all colours, for it was Sunday, the poor

man's holiday. The narrow precipitous streets, stifling in the downpour of sun, were void of every living thing but a cat or two and a child playing in the shade. On the flags of the church-porch an old blind and battered beggar lay huddled in sleep, and by his side was his eleemosynary piedish, empty of alms. Within the sombre edifice were two worshippers, and only two, a pair of old, old crones in dilapidated gowns and slatternly shoes, kneeling in front of the great gilt cross, garrulously whispering Spanish scandal into each other's ears. As we passed down again to the quay we encountered, toiling up one of the tortuous dusty streets, a curious kind of stage-coach, drawn by half-a-dozen threadbare horses, which was so high-bottomed and low-roofed that we were driven to the dismal conclusion that, before he could be accommodated inside, the unhappy traveller would either be compelled to sit on the floor or consent to have his legs amputated at the stump.

Next morning we were violently awakened by the booming shriek of the steam-whistle, and glancing tentatively through the porthole beheld nothing but a great whiteness. We were befogged. For six unutterable hours, while the vessel drifted listlessly on the lapping water, the fog-bell tolled at intervals of three minutes, funereally, exasperatingly. It was late in the afternoon when we crept out under the fringe of the mist and made off at a spanking pace for Lisbon. As the night dropped down the moon hung out her yellow lamp above the black and jagged wall of Portugal; and as we burrowed steadily along, trailing a glittering wake at our stern, a school of porpoises kept us company, and though we were going as fast as steam would drive us, they spun along before and behind and around us, made sport of our best speed, flashing, as they took their headlong leaps, like steel blades in the moonlight, and then plunging out of sight into their dark world. At midnight we entered the Tagus, creeping, a shadowy bulk, between the faint outlines of shore, past the solitary lighthouse, which glared on us for a moment as we slipped by, until, rounding a head of land, we came suddenly upon Lisbon and stopped in mid-river.

I thought we had sailed into Fairyland. Tier upon tier the city rose, mounting from the shore, white in the moon's rays, like a magic city of clouds or of snow, glimmering with a thousand dots of light, as though a fleet of stars lay at their moorings there. High above the houses the tranquil moon 'climbed the skies,'

glorifying the city with her radiance. Across the water from the fairground of Belém, where the lights were at their thickest and the fun was also, came a whisper of gaiety and dance-music in fitful intermission.

At a painfully early hour next morning the ship's company woke up and began to disperse. There were hurrys to and fro, alarums, excursions, Rachel agonising for her trunks, which were not, and refusing indignantly to be consoled and reassured touching their safety. Seated at length beneath the awning of a skiff, with our baggage piled in the bow, we suffered ourselves to be rowed ashore and set down on the shallow steps of the custom-house quay. It was no longer fairyland. To be sure the city was white and pleasant to look upon, but the odours through which we won our way towards the shore were too fishy and foetid to be associated with anything but the most mundane grossness. The carriage which we hailed and entered, drawn by the customary complement of two horses, which the prevailing perpendicularity of the city's ways renders expedient and even necessary, took us through Black Horse Square and along the river-road toward our destination. Much as the heat was a matter of course at that season of the year, it did not therefore fail to be a matter of no little annoyance to us in our Northern attire and our insular stovepipe hats. There was some solace, though not much, to be derived from a fond contemplation of the limpid breadths of the Tagus shining on our left hand, carrying out to sea craft of all sorts and sizes on their various errands. There was no solace whatever, only an augmentation of discomfort, in looking at the dazzling white streets and dusty roads which climbed up from the river side, from time to time pausing to broaden into a plateau of gardens or expand into a public square, and then on and up again till they crawled out of sight over the summits of the Seven Hills on which Lisbon, with topographical plagiarism, lays claim to be built. Screaming, ungainly ox-carts we overtook on our journey, dragged always by a yoke of passive, pensive bullocks, the solemnest animals on earth, from whose muzzles a thread of slime was invariably dependent. Before one of the front doors which we passed (if to generalise were not as dangerous as to prophesy, I should say without more ado that all front doors in Lisbon abut directly on the footway), there stood a certain somnolent cow about whose patient head and lachrymose eyes a horde of flies were making merry, whilst beneath it, upon a

diminutive stool, artfully placed in the animal's shadow, sat the milkman gripping his can between his knees, into which he played the alternating jets of milk. It was a touching sight, and one to make an Englishman remember with not unnatural bitterness the chalk-water of his native land, for in Lisbon every cow is its own milk-cart, and the consumer has all the adulteration to do himself.

More even than in most Continental towns, the houses in Lisbon are flat-faced, and the monotony of surface is broken only by an occasional balcony, woven like some iron spider's-web along the airy height of a third or fourth storey. Indeed, so close is the family likeness between building and building, that the casual observer (that ubiquitous and ghostly being, whom one hears so much of and never sees) is easily betrayed into confounding the Duke of Palma's palace with his Grace's stables, for they stand shoulder to shoulder, and are of one architecture and one hue of whitewash. Many of the house-fronts are picturesquely plated over with storied tiles, a sight which leaves you with the impression that the tiled flooring of some spacious hall had been reared up bodily on end and pressed to serve as a street wall. It was on an upper balcony attached to one of these stately tiled palaces, appertaining to a Portuguese noble, that on a certain blessed occasion, chancing to stroll by in the shade of the opposite side walk, we caught sight, not indeed of the marquis—such an occurrence would hardly have called for recognition—but of the marquis's butler himself, who, in gorgeous raiment, littered with gold fringe, lolled against the railing with superb listlessness, sunning his pitch-black complexion in an interval of leisure. Passing up from the streets on the lower level (some few of which are barely wide enough to admit of a tram and a hand-cart at one and the same time), you reach the older parts of the town, where the zigzag steep streets grow still more narrow, where no trams are and but few carriages, and where, though godliness may exist, its fellow-virtue cleanliness palpably does not. The jail is situated in this quarter. A bald and weather-stained brick building, of several storeys in height; gloomy and dirty and flush with the public highway, it bears a suggestive resemblance to some of our huge grimy English warehouses. To judge from the licence permitted the prisoners, it is far from being a model jail. At almost all of the windows, which are merely barred apertures, a group of truculent unkempt faces peer down through the iron ribs on the look-out for

prey; and as you pass beneath the wall you find half a score of small baskets, tied to lengths of string, bobbing before your face and soliciting alms for the rascally anglers aloft. If you refuse to allow your pocket to be picked through the medium of basket and string for their benefit, these caged birds have a retaliatory habit of not only reviling but defiling you, for they are one and all past masters in the art and practice of salivation.

From the sacristans of most of the show churches in Lisbon you hear the same melancholy account of the spoliation which the sacred edifices suffered at the hands of the French during the Peninsular wars; and they confess with a sigh that the massive silver candelabra and richly-embossed crucifixes on which you lavish a flattering admiration are not by any means what they seem, but mere carved timber thinly veneered with silver. As for the originals, they went into Napoleon's melting-pots and came out again coin of the realm. In the church of St. Roque there are some remarkable mural mosaics, copying with wonderful fidelity and success works of art by Michael Angelo, Guido, Urbino, and others. The labour of building up, bit by bit, these marvellous mosaics occupied a space of fifteen years, and must have demanded a superhuman patience at the hands of the artists who constructed them. In another church (of St. Catherine, I think) there are exhibits of a more questionable taste, but of far greater popularity. To visit one of these it is necessary to pass through a side door and up a set of dingy corkscrew stairs which conduct you with difficulty into a dark and stuffy loft, the atmosphere in which has grown stale from age and close confinement. In this squalid hole you find yourself in the awkward presence of a rickety timber image of our Saviour, life-size, kneeling with his periwigged head thrust into a corner, whilst a huge black cross weighs heavily on one wooden shoulder. This wretched and insulting caricature has earned for itself, through the fantastic credulity of its idolaters, the reputation of being a curative medium of high efficacy, and there are evidences of its extensive popularity in the soiled state of its left heel, which has been worn and mottled by the thousands of devout lips that have come to kiss and pray of this log to intercede for the cure of their ailments. Below this chamber, in a sort of cellar, there is a miniature exhibition of waxworks, consisting of diminutive wax-models of those parts of the devotees' bodies from which the disease had been charmed away as a result of intercession with the effigy overhead. But the idiosyncrasies of Lisbon are to

be sought rather in its every-day streets than in its churches, and there you find them, mixed up with a great deal of noise. As a Babel of tongues, there is not much to choose between Venice and Lisbon, though perhaps candour would assign the palm for noisiness to the former city. From early morn to dewy eve Lisbon is vocal with the clamorous cries of pedlars, hawkers, and costers of both sexes, either themselves carrying the wares they are crying, or lugging after them a loutish mule slung fore and aft with their merchandise. Whatever the quality of the wares may be, there is never any question about the quality and quantity of the voice which proclaims them; and by a curious fatality its range and shrillness is generally in inverse proportion to the value and desirability of the merchandise whose praises it celebrates. There is one street cry, perhaps the most complicated it was ever our misfortune to hear, which to this day towers above all competitors in my memory. It belonged to a man who was crying the number of a lottery ticket (he had but one), which he displayed for sale in one hand as he slowly perambulated the street. He started off on a very high note, too high apparently to be sustained, for he tumbled suddenly down the gamut into the bass and began again there. Gradually working his way into the treble, he wavered about for a few notes in a state of uncertainty, and then proceeded to execute a remarkable *diminuendo* passage, letting his voice fade away and thus causing you to felicitate yourself that he had turned the corner into another street. No such thing; it was his voice only which had temporarily turned the corner. From the gentlest *pianissimo* it began to gather volume and grow till it had attained a powerful *fortissimo*, when, without the least warning, it dashed wildly up the scale and disappeared off the top note into silence. And all about one lottery ticket! Indeed, I have come to think the ticket may after all have only been a 'blind,' he seemed to care so much about his song, and so very, very little about the ticket.

In making the admission that we saw our first bull-fight on the sacredest day of the week, we have still the grace, or the insularity, to be a little ashamed of ourselves. But we could hardly be held in fairness responsible in that matter, since if we wished to see the national game at all it was necessary to see it on its appointed day, which is the one dedicated by the Portuguese to the worship of God and the baiting of bulls. But lest the

gentle reader should yawn outright over the page, I hasten to reassure him that his fears of being bored by still another of the interminable descriptions of the Peninsular bull-fight are entirely groundless. However exciting as a spectacle, especially to a green islander, it makes dreary and nauseous reading even in the liveliest of pages, besides being written to the death. In brief, then, the battle of the bulls—there were fifteen of them—on that particular afternoon was a magnificent and imposing show, none the less pleasing from its bloodless character, for the Portuguese arena is not permitted to be turned into a shambles, like the Spanish. The horns of the bulls are thickly padded at the extremities with cork and leather, and neither they nor the horses, which are of the finest and fleetest breed, are allowed to be killed of malice aforethought, though accidents will happen even in the best regulated arena, and it was our chance to see a *picadore* stamped within an ace of death by an infuriate bull.

One morning we set out in a hired chariot for Cintra, which is to Lisbon what Poona is to Bombay. The road runs bare and brown for many miles through a flat landscape asleep in a sultry silence, before it begins to climb the slopes of the hills on which Cintra lies, amid a 'variegated maze of mount and glen,' as Byron wrote of it. To be sure, there is nothing very noteworthy in Cintra beyond its scenery and its air, both of the best, if we except its Moorish palace, which is a fine structure in admirable condition. It stands within an ancient little garden, dense and aromatic with trees appropriate to its romantic architecture, such as the gigantic palm, the ethereal pepper-tree, the grotesque and savage cactus, and in the midst of them leaps and babbles a fountain half lost in the white wreaths of its descending spray. Many of the apartments are sheathed round their walls with cool blue tiles. The dining hall, a simple chamber of stone, dark and cool at mid-day, having a shallow marble font sunk into the centre of the floor, round which the Moors sat to eat, with the crystal water gurgling and seething in their midst, looks for all the world as if it had been designed and built by an architect expressly roused up in the middle of one of the 'Arabian Nights' to do it. In an upper storey you are shown the room where the unhappy sixth Alfonzo suffered eight years' solitary confinement at the instigation of his brother. Along one side of the cheerless chamber the tiles of the floor are worn and blurred by the passing and repassing of his feet on the hopeless weary tramp which was

to end only when the 'fell sergeant Death' tapped him on the shoulder and took him away.

Behind a pair of obstreperous horses and a blasphemous coachman we pilgrimaged to Mafra on a day of mist and rain to visit the cathedral-palace, which, like the illustrious son of some peasant mother, is Mafra's sole claim to distinction. She looked so squalid, so mean and solitary, on that reeking afternoon, that it was a strain upon the fancy to conjure up the gay and bustling scene which she must have presented when in the palace

dwelt of yore the Lusian's luckless queen,
And church and court did mingle their array.

And yet the loneliness of the village was cheerful in comparison with the melancholy desolation and ghostly solitudes of the stupendous edifice which had once been the focus of all that was gay and fashionable and courtly in Portugal. Our way up from the dripping grass-grown courtyard to the roofs of the palace took us through long vistas of chambers which the meagreness of our historical knowledge made it possible for us to sentimentalise over and re-people with the spirits of the illustrious dead only in the most rudimentary way. The bells, of which I believe there are 114, are driven by machinery, which in its turn is driven by a man who, with leather-padded fists, sits thumping out his triple bob majors, his carillons and what not, on a gigantic kind of organ keyboard. As we stood humbly beside him in his diabolical belfry-tower he pulled on his boxing gloves and hammered out, with great taste and feeling, and the spirit of a prizefighter, a perfect thunderstorm of deafening tintinnabulation from the bells overhead which, when it ceased, he took occasion to inform us had represented a selection from 'Martha.' Formerly the conventual part of the palace lodged four hundred monks, but they were long ago smoked out of their hives by the Government. At present the library, a princely gallery of considerable extent, contains upwards of forty thousand books, largely ecclesiastical, and bound for the most part in vellum. In the cathedral proper are preserved several closetsful of priestly vestments delicately and richly embroidered in silk and gold thread by Italian workmen in the last century.

Mounted upon asses, we scaled one day the summit of the hill on the shaggy slope of which Cintra lies dispersedly. Unchallenged we clattered under the portcullis of the royal castle which fittingly crowns the hill-top, and rode into the courtyard. The

place is very ancient and very quaint, and, in addition to its picturesque and historical attractions, derives interest from the fact that it was from the vantage-ground of the castleyard that on July 8, 1497, Emanuel V. watched the vessels of his bold mariner, Vasco de Gama, dwindle to a shining point upon the azure horizon, on their perilous way to the discovery of India. After a descent of the hill through lanes of towering trees, and a ride across a bare, sun-stricken country, we halted at mid-day at the gate of the Cork Convent, where we stayed our hunger on honey and sandwiches and the wine of the district. The convent is as odd as it is old, and that is saying much. Hewn out of the rock, its few rude rooms were partitioned off, and further, furnished with corkwood, whence the convent's name. The ten friars who once upon a time made it their home must have been spare men of peaceable dispositions to have rendered life tolerable within the dimensions and the consequent discomforts of this tiniest of convents, for its doors reach no higher than your shoulder, and its cells are barely larger than an ordinary wardrobe. The prison-chamber in which the backsliding brother was confined is a gloomy little cavern, but, as the door is of the lightest of cork, and the latch no stronger than a toothpick, it must have been moral suasion alone that kept the sinful friar from making a dash for liberty. Close at hand is the little underground cave which for fourteen years was the residence of St. Honorius, whose death occurred in 1596, and of whom Byron wrote unkindly—

Deep in yon cave Honorius long did dwell,
In hope to merit heaven by making earth a hell.

Over the lowly entrance, which is effected by means of four cracked and mossy steps, a Latin inscription drily and briefly sets forth the life and death of this subterranean saint.

Mounting again, we whooped our asses forward, yelling into their ears the 'Anda booro!' which is the Portuguese equivalent for 'gee-up.' The sun blazed upon us mercilessly, and the landscape lay stricken in a torrid silence. The sheep were huddled under the shadows of every bush and stone. Monstrous yellow pumpkins lolled corpulently in the fields and on the heavily thatched roofs of cottages, any one of them large enough to have served for the family coach of the Princess Cinderella. Every now and then we filed through tracks of tangled vines, in the midst of which we caught occasional glimpses of some crimson-kerchiefed countryman wading and working up to his armpits.

Long before we reached the slant of hill at the foot of which we quitted our animals, our ears had been filled with the sound of a deep continuous humming noise, as it might be of a mighty wind rushing high overhead. After a stiff climb we topped the hill, and on its broad summit stood and saw before us a measureless expanse of azure sea, and heard it roaring and tumbling its wild breakers into foam at the base of the precipitous westward slope of the cliff on which we were. Smooth and glassy as is the seaward slope of this hill, perilous as is its perpendicularity, fishermen go down it as a matter of daily course to lay their lines on the huge slabs of detached rock in the very teeth of the Atlantic. For 200 reis (a modest 10*d.*) a young fisherman showed us how it was done. Having kicked off his boots and lifted his Phrygian cap in a brief prayer to the Virgin, he sat down on the edge of the dangerous incline and began to slither cautiously down it backwards, using his naked feet and hands to steady and retard his progress. Every little knob, and ridge, and crack of the rock was turned to account; a single slip, the displacement of a pebble, would have meant instant and awful death.

However, contrary to our anticipations, he reached the end of his journey in safety, and out of bravado stood up on his hands on one of the tables of rock, which the sea showered with spray at every charge, and there waved us a friendly salute with his brown heels. When he had clambered up to us again and received his fee, he told us that the chief peril—and indeed to him the only one—which he had encountered in his descent, was the wind that raged at the foot of the cliff, although upon its summit we stood in a burning calm.

Of the long and comfortless ride home, up hill and down dale, on the ridgy backs of those asses, followed for leagues in tireless pursuit by the donkey-man with his stimulating war-whoop and his stick, I am only too fain to spare my reader and myself the harrowing story. Faust on his Mephistophelian steed, urging his wild career down the easy slope to Avernus, with the devil at his elbow and Berlioz' demoniac music sounding in his ears, suffered, I am persuaded, an agony less poignant than ours, for his horse was not an ass, and his journey was the sooner over.

A FOOL'S TASK.

The wise man's folly is anatomised
Even by the squandering glances of a fool.—*Shakespeare.*

CHAPTER I.

THE TORN LETTER.

‘WE have very little sunshine in these days, and what we have is not worth much,’ said Nat Pepsley, when he stood on the wooden bridge which crossed Lazy Beck, as people called the sluggish stream which flowed through Garside Wood.

Lazy Beck could scarcely be said to flow. In Nat Pepsley’s language, ‘it just shuffled along as if it meant to come back again, and did not care to go too far.’

Nat communicated his opinions to the empty air, because he had no companions who had patience enough to listen while he spoke. The boys simply made fun of him, and upgrown people told him not to make a fool of himself. He was troubled with fits—that was all he had to say about his own maladies and deficiencies; but the people in the neighbourhood said he was ‘not all there,’ or they expressed their opinions with more brevity and emphasis by calling him an idiot.

‘Who is soft?’ asked the rude boys when they saw Nat in the street. ‘Who hasn’t all his buttons on? Who has a slate loose?’

Nat did not become enraged, but he replied:

‘My mother says everybody’s soft who makes fun of people who have fits.’

This was received with merriment by the young tormentors. Then perhaps one of them would propose a question in arithmetic to Nat—something requiring considerable skill at calculation; but after a few moments’ thought the answer was invariably given correctly.

‘Wrong!’ was the common exclamation on such occasions.

This imputation seemed to pain Nat more than any of the names by which he was called, and he would walk away, to find a retreat in the woods, and talk about the insanity of people in general.

Nat Pepsley looked like a boy, but he was a man in years.

His development, mental and physical, had been retarded, all except his powers of calculation, and they were extraordinary. He could play draughts also better than anybody in Frewston. Men did not care to play with him because he invariably beat them; and he did not care to play with boys because they cheated and treated him roughly after their defeat.

Frewston was a manufacturing village in Yorkshire. Nearly all the workers were employed at the large mills of Bastow & Borcliffe. Nat Pepsley had often tried to obtain a situation there, but his fits were an insuperable difficulty, and his time was spent wandering about and making strange calculations concerning anything which came under his observation. He liked the summer, when he could lie in the woods and gaze at the myriads of leaves upon the trees and form an opinion about the number in Garside Wood alone. Then he thought about other woods, until his brain began to reel under the mighty pile of figures which he erected. In winter, if snow was on the ground, he troubled himself with the flakes, and tried to form an opinion about the quantity which were required to drape Garside Wood in white.

Winter, before the snow came, was a dreary time to Nat; and he had an objection to wet murky weeks in November and December, which saner people have also felt.

'Why isn't it sunshiny?' he asked, looking at the dull sky. 'Why doesn't it snow?' he continued, turning his attention to the clammy earth. 'It ought to be summer this morning and winter to-night, that is what it ought to be; and then when we have had enough of it there should be a change—winter some night and summer next morning.'

But there was one task which Nat was able to perform during that distasteful season which he said was neither cooked nor raw, but was like a green apple. (His powers of metaphor were manifestly inferior to his arithmetic.) He could stand on the wooden bridge and try to estimate how long it would take the water of Lazy Beck to reach London.

'I believe that water has fits,' he said, 'and never gets out of them properly. Out of one into another, just like me when my mother cries and my father smokes twice as much bacca as usual.'

Somebody had told Nat that smoking was good for fits, but neither his mother nor father was of that opinion. They were

afraid he would set himself on fire, and they refused to allow him to follow his inclination, which set in strongly towards tobacco. But there were people in Frewston who were prepared to ascribe all possible virtues to a pipe of tobacco, a glass of beer, or a pinch of snuff. Men who enjoyed their pipe liked to think that they were performing a beneficial act as well as taking their pleasure. There were old women, too, in Frewston, who said they could not breathe unless they smoked at least four pipes a day. In a community like that Nat was able to provide himself with the prohibited weed. It had to be earned, of course, by task work in connection with elaborate calculations.

'Tell me how many minutes I have lived and thou shalt fill thy pipe,' was a form of challenge which Nat often heard. He obtained the exact age of the person, and then in a short time gave his answer. The tobacco was always forthcoming, and Nat made off to some quiet nook where he could enjoy it. There was a danger that in the minds of Frewston people great skill at calculation might be associated with general imbecility, especially if Nat asked which end of a match it was that gave the light when it was struck, and then he gazed on the sulphur as if he was afraid he would forget his instructions.

When Nat thought about his father smoking twice as much tobacco as usual, he was reminded that he had in his pocket a pipe ready filled, and he decided that his best plan was to find a cosy place and enjoy himself. It was the month of December, but no snow had fallen, and the country had a cheerless look.

'It's just like having a pipe and no bacca, or bacca and no pipe,' said Nat, looking round, 'or like a match with two wrong ends.'

People sometimes gave him matches which would only strike on the box, and when he had not the necessary box, or did not know that it was needful, he experienced many disappointments, and said both ends of such matches were wrong.

But he knew where he could make himself comfortable. There was the trunk of an old tree not far from the bridge; this trunk was hollow, but it was overgrown with ivy. Within the cavity which time had wrought Nat often sat, screened from observation by the ivy, and there he smoked his pipe in peace. He had dry stones inside on which he struck his matches; and he had an old draught-board upon which he played many games with imaginary opponents. To his surprise he was often beaten,

but he took his defeats in good part, saying, 'Nat can beat Nat, but nobody else can, not even people who have no fits.'

When he had ensconced himself in his retreat, and had overcome that immense difficulty which getting a light always presented to him, and was puffing away at his pipe in a manner which was quite as rational as that of any smoker in Frewston, he became conscious that somebody had taken the place which he had recently vacated on the bridge.

A young man was gazing intently at the slowly moving stream. He leaned upon the rail and seemed absorbed in thought.

'I know what he is doing,' said Nat; 'he is reckoning how long it would take the Lazy Beck to reach London.'

Then the young man drew a paper from his pocket.

'He's going to do it like schoolboys do their sums,' was Nat's next comment, in a very disdainful tone.

But Nat was wrong. No pencil made its appearance. The young man read the paper several times, and then tore it in two. The pieces were torn again and again, until a handful of small fragments remained. These were thrown down with violence into the stream below, and the young man leaned upon the rail again, and watched them slowly drift away.

'Sixty-four pieces, I should say,' Nat remarked, 'if he tore them fairly every time, and in an hour they will be at Fumby Corner.'

The young man stood there a long time, utterly ignorant of the watchful eyes which were upon him. Then he left the bridge and walked slowly towards the highway.

Nat finished his pipe, and filled it again from a small store of tobacco which he had in the tree. Then, when he thought an hour had elapsed, he made his way to Fumby Corner, and waited patiently for the fragments of paper. Fifty bits came down the stream, and these he secured; then he went along the bank, and found various portions which had been stopped by overhanging weeds and branches.

'I think I have them all,' he said, when he reached the bridge. 'Now I'll have another pipe, and see what they are written about. Lazy Beck, I feel sure.'

In a few minutes he was snugly ensconced once more in the hollow of the tree.

CHAPTER II.

THE MISSING YOUTH.

PEOPLE whose children were 'right and tight, and had not a flaw in them,' to use an expression which was common at Frewston, were in the habit of wondering how it happened that fathers and mothers like Silas and Betty Pepsley doted so much on a half-witted son like Nat.

'It's very wonderful, it is indeed,' said Susan Midgebout. 'If Nat had been mine, I think I should have asked the Lord to take him.'

Susan always wore a nightcap, and was one of the Frewston women who could not breathe unless they smoked at least four pipes of tobacco every day. If anything very interesting was astir, Susan smoked a dozen pipes, if she smoked one. She was a little woman, not very old, but supposed to have seen more and thought more than her neighbours. Her husband at one time was given to wandering, and she had lived with him in several towns—not only Yorkshire towns, but some in Lancashire. It helped to close a discussion between Susan and any of her neighbours who would not accept her word as final, when she mentioned something which happened at Leeds or Manchester, and which seemed to bear upon the question.

The verdict of the Frewston gossips was, 'Those who stay at home have the easiest times, but those who go away have the most experience.' This was intended to cast the vote in Susan's favour, but also to hint that people who had not been great travellers had enjoyed a compensation by remaining at a happy place like Frewston. Susan did not object to this. She was ready to sigh and look thoughtful, as if her mind was dwelling upon the manifold perils through which she had passed. Susan had a kind heart; and it is safe to surmise that if Nat Pepsley had been her son she would have been as fond of him as his own mother was. But there was a tendency to agree with what she said about the matter, and to express astonishment that Silas and Betty Pepsley did not want 'the Lord to take their son.'

'Nat is all for catching birds,' said Ann Gowden, a loosely built woman, whose clothes always seemed too large for her. The great task of her life was to fasten her hair with a dilapidated back-

comb, which was continually coming out and letting the hair down again.

'A bit of his birdlime on that comb would be an improvement,' said Eunice Kirk, a thin, sharp woman, who looked as if her clothes had been put on as a permanency, they fitted her so closely, and were so neat and orderly.

Ann Gowden was not quick at taking offence, but she pushed up her recreant hair and stuck in the broken comb without remark.

Betty Pepsley was not a gossip. In small places like Frewston people are in the habit of accepting calamities as if they were crosses which must be borne in comparative silence all the life long. If a child came into the world with any deformity, it was looked upon as a kind of judgment; and the parents of the child felt that henceforth they must move among their fellows at a disadvantage. But Nat Pepsley's deficiencies manifested themselves gradually, and it was only as the years went by that his father and mother felt their misfortune; then they quietly withdrew from the society of their neighbours, and became more and more devoted to their half imbecile son. Susan Midgebout, who had lived in cosmopolitan places like Leeds and Manchester, where people did not appear to take troubles of that sort to heart so much, was inclined to question the propriety of Betty having so little to say to her neighbours. But this was an innovation from the outer world which Frewston women could not accept. Susan, however, puffed at her pipe, and said there were single streets in Leeds or Manchester which would hold all Frewston, without anybody being particularly crowded. The remark scarcely bore upon the subject in dispute, but it was not without its awe-inspiring influence upon those who heard it.

There was a proverb in Frewston which related to children, and had reference to their wandering proclivities. 'Meal-times and bed-times bring them home,' said the easy-going mothers when Tommy or Polly was out of sight. As a rule, the proverb was correct enough, and the wayward ones came back from their various rambles when the voice of nature cried for food or rest.

But, as Silas Pepsley said, 'Proverbs don't make things true, they only tell you what generally happens; and if things are contrary, you cannot put them straight by talking proverbs to them.'

Nat Pepsley had not returned one day to his dinner, and he

had not returned to his tea, and, worst of all, he had not returned when bed-time came.

It was the week before Christmas when this happened, and the snow, which had seemed to keep back so unreasonably long, appeared to be making up for lost time; it fell without intermission, and lay thick and white upon the earth.

Nat was not always as mindful of regular meal-times as the young people who had no infirmity of mind, but he had never before absented himself from home all night. Many were the questions which had to be answered by the boys who were known to be among Nat's chief tormentors. They declared, one and all, that they had not seen 'Softy,' to use their favourite nickname.

George Cawlishaw was generally called a 'rip.' He was the leader in most of the mischief which took place among the rising race, and he had often made Nat cry; so the thoughts of most people turned to George, and it was expected that he would be able to throw some light upon the mystery. But he declared that he had not seen Nat for two or three days. George was red-headed and had a pug nose, which did not add to his beauty. He had large strong teeth also, and could break a nail with them, a feat which he was fond of performing. He felt honoured when he knew that he was singled out as the most likely boy to have caused Nat's disappearance; being only about thirteen years old, he felt that importance was thrust upon him early in life.

'I seed him near the "Packhorse,"' said George. "'And what have you gotten in your hand?' I asked. "Birdlime," he said. "Let me look at it," says I, and off he goes like anything, and I couldn't catch him because he went over walls, and nobody can catch him over walls when he gets a start.'

'What did you want to catch him for?' somebody asked, who saw that George could not be proved guilty of the fault which was first laid to his charge, but who perceived how another offence might possibly be brought home to him.

'Yes, what did thou want to catch him for?' asked other neighbours, who knew quite well that almost every boy in the village had done the same thing times innumerable. But the public conscience seems to wake up when there is an event out of the common, and people become inconveniently exacting all at once.

George made no reply, but took to his heels and sought the security of his own home. Heads were shaken after his summary

departure, and the opinion was expressed that poor Nat Pepsley was not the only one who might have died in his cradle with advantage to his friends.

After George had gone the conversation turned again upon the extraordinary fondness of Silas and Betty for their afflicted son.

'I shouldn't like Nat to disappear and never turn up again,' said Ann Gowden, fastening her hair for the third time within half an hour.

'Who said you would?' asked Eunice Kirk sharply, as if Ann's remark had intimated that other people were short of feeling. Eunice invariably took Ann up if there was an opportunity; but Ann was one of those good-natured people who have a vague idea that they are faulty in some respects, and must submit as patiently as possible to the censures and corrections of their neighbours.

Susan Midgebout came to the rescue, by telling what had happened in Manchester when she lived there. It was about a disappearance, and the impression made upon the hearers was that it is as common a thing for people to disappear from Manchester as to remain at home.

'But Frewston is very different,' Eunice Kirk remarked, 'and I am glad it is. What would be the good of living here if we were no better off than they are in big towns, where they have gas-lamps in every street and policemen walking up and down?'

Eunice had a way of coming down heavily upon people who differed from her, and though there was a general idea that she was wrong in many of her opinions, yet it was known by experience that nothing pleasant came out of controversy with her; so the gossips took the opportunity of adjourning to their several homes, or they walked as far as the cottage where the Pepsleys lived.

Betty Pepsley looked like a person who had suffered a great deal. She always wore black, and that was singular in a place like Frewston; but many years before she had occasion to go into mourning for her mother, and had never worn garments of any other colour since. She spoke but few words, and had a habit of placing her left hand upon her mouth when anybody addressed her. Silas, her husband, had the appearance of a man who knew that life could not turn out very well for him, but who cared very little about that; he usually had both hands in his pockets when

he was not working, and he shook his head a good deal, as if he was passing silent verdicts upon the condition of society.

Silas worked at Bastow & Borcliffe's, and had worked there all his life. He was a steady, industrious man, and was trusted by his employers, but since Nat's disappearance he had not been near the mill. He had worn himself out ranging about the country. He was in the cottage, however, when the gossips entered. Betty placed her hand on her mouth and shook her head when she was asked whether anything had been heard or not; but Silas, with both hands in his pockets, said, 'The lad will not be found here, and if you people want to help you will go and look for him.'

Thus rebuked, the gossips beat a speedy retreat.

CHAPTER III.

THE COMING MEN.

It was sometimes said that Frewston people worshipped the names of Bastow and Borcliffe. This, however, was the sarcastic remark of outsiders, such as the men and women of Northbridge and Harding, where there were only third-rate mills. The Frewston people themselves repudiated the charge, and ascribed it to the ignorance and envy of those who would have been thankful to find employment with a firm where short time was unknown and wages were good.

The founders of the firm were dead. John Bastow and James Borcliffe had started life in humble circumstances, but by their energy and enterprise they had established a business which was second to none in the district. Their children did not follow in their footsteps; the plain living and hard work of the seniors was not relished by the next generation. What the founders had looked after themselves the sons left to trustworthy servants. But still the business flourished, and the old names were revered by the common people.

There were both Bastows and Borcliffes, however, at Frewston who were not partners in the firm. They were descended from brothers or cousins of the founders, and enjoyed a kind of reflected glory, but they were servants, and some of them did not occupy positions of great importance. If any of these Bastows or Bor-

cliffes manifested unusual ability they were sure to be promoted; and many of the foremen and chiefs of departments rejoiced in the names by which the proprietors were distinguished, and perhaps rejoiced in kinship with the great people. There were dissatisfied men and women even in Frewston. Some of them, who had never made any advance in social position, but who had gone on from year to year without enterprise or effort, were fond of laying the blame upon their names.

‘If I happened to be called Bastow instead of Pickles I should not be messing about doing odd jobs.’ A remark like that might often be heard in the kitchen of the ‘Packhorse.’

‘And if I happened to be called Borcliffe instead of Chowt I shouldn’t be a carter,’ was a common reply.

That was not a fair criticism, because there were both Bastows and Borcliffes who were among the poorest people in Frewston. If Sydney Bastow had risen from the ranks, it was because of his ability and industry; and if Fred Borcliffe had come to the front, it was because he had striven to qualify himself for a post of honour.

Frewston was a place to stimulate ambition. On the hillsides all around were mansions which had been built by Bastows and Borcliffes, or by those who had married daughters of the families. Perhaps the owners were often away, in London or on the Continent, but the houses were there, like monuments which testified to the possibility of self-help. They had been built out of Frewston Mill, and the mill had been started by two poor men. It was generally understood that times had changed, and that people could not accumulate fortunes as readily as was done fifty years before, but there were sanguine exceptions to the rule—men who said the sea contained as good fish as ever were caught, and that the world became no worse when it became older.

Sydney Bastow and Fred Borcliffe were sometimes called the ‘coming men’ by these people in Frewston, who had no objection to apply high-sounding names to the prominent features of a village.

‘Those two will be heard about,’ said the local prophets. ‘It is in them to make a noise, and what’s in a man comes out one way or another.’

If such remarks were made in the hearing of persons who had no admiration or good wishes for Sydney and Fred, there was a reply to the effect that high climbing and far falling often went together.

Sydney and Fred were distant kinsmen of the Bastows and the

Boreliffes, as it was customary to distinguish the individuals who not only enjoyed the family names, but shared the fortune which made the names famous. Sydney was in the office, and was looked upon as the man who had the financial affairs of Frewston Mill at his fingers' ends. Fred's tastes had led him to pay attention to the manufacturing part of the business, and he was credited with having made improvements in machinery which saved considerable sums in the production of woollens, and placed the firm in a good position for competing with their rivals in the markets of the world.

There was one man in Frewston who was looked upon as the wit of the place, and whose remarks were constantly quoted by his neighbours; this was Amos Pulp, an excellent singer, and, what was more surprising in the opinion of his admirers, 'a chap who made his songs out of his own head—songs about anybody or anything—and sung them, too, just as if somebody else had made them.' It was difficult to say how Pulp lived. Perhaps the fact that his wife and children all went to the mill might explain the mystery; but certain it was that Amos himself did not work. He was a bright and shining light at the 'Packhorse,' and he said he was never so happy as when he was making others happy, which really meant when he was drinking at his friends' expense, and making sport for them in return for their generosity.

Amos Pulp said that people who get on in the world are either wolves or foxes; and in his opinion Fred Borecliffe was a wolf, and Sydney Bastow was a fox.

As the frequent customers at the 'Packhorse' were not in any danger of getting on in the world, it commonly happened that this opinion was favourably received without any careful investigation. Perhaps there was a little doubt about the application of the principle. Was Fred a wolf, and was Sydney a fox? Amos could call witnesses to testify that Fred Borecliffe was impatient and overbearing towards the men. Then he asked, 'Is not Sydney Bastow fair and pleasant with everybody?' Could anything more be required to prove the point? If so, Amos would sing a song about the wolf and the fox.

This song represented the wolf and fox going into partnership, and deciding that between them they would conquer the world. The wolf was to use his teeth and the fox his tongue. By force and cunning they managed to exterminate all the animals in the

district where they lived; then they quarrelled, and the wolf killed the fox and ate him, but the fox's tongue stuck in the wolf's throat with fatal results. The wolf's dying words were—

I don't know which of us wins.
 I killed the fox, I say;
 I killed him for his sins,
 And now the price I pay;
 For the fox's tongue will stop my breath
 And doom me to an untimely death—
 And doom me to an untimely death!

Who could argue against a song? It was far easier to express admiration of the singer than to venture into the stormy sea of criticism; so the glasses were filled again, and Amos was encored.

'Amos ought to write a book, he ought indeed,' said the toppers; 'he would make his fortune. Everybody in Frewston would buy it.'

Everything contained in this statement was received with perfect unanimity.

Sydney and Fred were about the same age; they had been schoolfellows together, and had risen in their different departments with equal rapidity. But they had never been companions, and it was rumoured among the people that there was no love lost between them.

'They both mean to get to the top,' said the gossips, 'and they seem to think there is room for only one there.'

'I think Fred Borcliffe will win,' was a remark often heard; 'he has his head full of machinery, and machinery's the thing in these days. They say Sydney is wonderful at books and figures, but what are books and figures? Amos Pulp could write a book, and as to figures, Nat Pepsley can do more with them than anybody in Frewston—a good deal more than Sydney Bastow can.'

'But there's Miss Alice Ventnor.'

This was a remark made by one who believed in Sydney's chances, and it was known to be an important consideration. All the advocates of Fred Borcliffe could say was:

'Suppose Fred gets Miss Alice, then where is Sydney?'

Shaken heads were deemed a sufficient reply.

Miss Alice Ventnor was said to unite in herself the two famous families of Bastow and Borcliffe. She numbered among her ancestors kinsmen of both the founders of Frewston Mills. Her mother was a Borcliffe and her father's mother was a Bastow.

Hubert Ventnor, her father, was dead, and she lived with her widowed mother at Ferndene, one of the houses which could be seen from Frewston. Her father had been a partner in the firm, one of the working partners, and had taken great interest in Fred and Sydney. The common opinion was that one of them would win Alice's love, but parties were divided as to which of the rivals was likely to be successful. Mr. Ventnor was thought to have favoured Sydney, but Mrs. Ventnor was said to prefer Fred.

A few days before Christmas Frewston was thrown into a state of commotion which even caused the disappearance of Nat Pepsley to be forgotten. Sydney Bastow had been robbed of fifteen hundred pounds. He was driving from Holdworth, where he had been to the bank, and he was bringing the money for wages, as was his custom, when he had an accident near Garside Wood and was robbed. He was not injured much, but could scarcely give an account of what had happened. The horse had stumbled and Sydney had been pitched out of the gig and stunned; when he recovered he found that the bag containing the money was gone. He had seen nobody, and was as much puzzled with the affair as the rest of the people.

In some mysterious manner it began to be whispered about that Sydney had not been robbed, but had concocted a scheme by which he might appropriate the money without exciting suspicion.

CHAPTER IV.

RIVALS.

FERNDENE was a pleasant place, though Frewston Mill was the most prominent object in the landscape; but it was not an eyesore—artistic visitors were in the habit of saying that its appearance was as nearly picturesque as could be expected from a mill. Then there were hills all around, with wooded slopes, and there were various mansions dotted about. It was often remarked that all the houses connected with Frewston Mill were in sight of each other, and the mill could be seen from every one. People in other parts of the country were fond of calling the mansions 'mill-houses;' but as the Bastows and the Borcliffes advanced in wealth and importance the name lost any stigma which may have been attached to it at first, and 'mill-houses' was uttered without

sneer or contempt, especially by those who were said to have more rank than money, and who sometimes turned their thoughts towards Frewston when they wondered what would become of their marriageable daughters and their younger sons.

Alice Ventnor and her mother lived at Ferndene almost all the year round. That had been their custom during Mr. Ventnor's life, and they did not care to change it after his death. Mrs. Ventnor's leading feature seemed to be a sense of duty, and in her this sense took an exaggerated form which was almost ludicrous. Her friends said that she not only obeyed her conscience, but urged her conscience to become more and more exacting. Like all people of the kind, she was prone to impose her own views and feelings upon others, and she wanted her conscience to be not only her own monitor and guide but theirs also. It was unfortunate for Alice that her mother fancied Fred Borcliffe ought to be encouraged. Fred was rather blunt and dogmatic, and this appeared to suit Mrs. Ventnor's temperament. Alice would far rather have encouraged Sydney Bastow, but of course that was out of the question. The maiden's knowledge of her own heart's possibilities made her seem reserved. Her father had been fond of Sydney; that might have something to do with Mrs. Ventnor's preference for Fred, because that lady had not often found herself in strict accord with her husband's views. 'He was a good man according to his light,' she sometimes said, 'but I am afraid that on many points his light was defective.'

Mr. Ventnor had been a jovial kind of man, with a weakness, perhaps, for careless expressions, and it is possible that his wife's unreasoning and unreasonable fancies had sometimes made him say more than he meant. But he was a very generous man, and had taken a great interest in both Fred and Sydney. Without his help and encouragement it is not likely that either of them would have been able to overcome the difficulties which surrounded them in early life. He had said sometimes, 'I take more credit to myself for Fred than I do for Sydney. Fred had the making of almost anything in him, good, bad, or indifferent; but I think Sydney would have become a decent fellow wherever he had been. Then Fred had unfavourable surroundings; his family were not a good lot, I must say that, even though he has some of the real old Borcliffe blood in him. I got his folk to clear out of Frewston, which was a good job for Fred, and anything but a bad job for the rest of the people here. They went to

Grabdell, which is a bigger place; Grabdell people say it is a better place, too. That is a matter which I do not care to decide. Sydney was an orphan, and though nobody ever thinks an orphan is better for being without parents, yet I know what I know.'

During Mr. Ventnor's life Sydney and Fred had been frequent visitors at Ferndene, but after his death they did not go so often. It had always been easier to perceive that Mrs. Ventnor preferred Fred than that Mr. Ventnor preferred Sydney. But neither of the young men knew Alice's preference, or whether she cared about either of them.

In their different ways the young men both loved Alice, and the only person who seemed to be unconscious of it was Alice herself. There was no reserve or embarrassment about her when they came to Ferndene, or when she met them at other places. She had known them since childhood, and knew that they were remotely her kinsmen; her father had treated them almost as if they had been his own sons, and her mother had always welcomed them as if the tie which bound them had been of the closest kind.

Some people said Alice was rather too pale, others said she was rather too tall; therefore it would be safe to conjecture that no particular fault could be found with her appearance. She was tall, and she was pale, but these features in reality enhanced her beauty instead of spoiling it. In Sydney's eyes she was perfect, as he often said to himself. Perhaps Fred was never carried away sufficiently to give utterance, even in secret, to language so extravagant, but he felt that he would rather have Alice Ventnor than anybody else in the world.

The two young men appeared to take for granted that Alice would become the wife of one of them. They felt no jealousy towards any of their neighbours, or any of the eligible young fellows who lived farther away, and whom they met occasionally at one or other of the Bastow and Borcliffe houses. The struggle was between themselves, they knew, and they wondered with aching hearts what the result would be.

Alice was never mentioned between them, and no subject of a confidential character was ever discussed by them. Yet they did not quarrel, and a stranger could not have guessed that their feelings towards each other were akin to distrust and dislike.

Fred suspected that Alice preferred Sydney, but he was not sure, and he fancied that Sydney was too blind to perceive the

preference. Sydney never for a moment supposed that Alice cared more for Fred than for him, but he knew on which side the mother's partiality was, and he tormented himself with fears that this might affect the maiden's choice.

Neither of the lovers dared to speak—the time was not ripe for that; but in each heart the feeling grew stronger that if fortune would remove the rival, then the long-desired chance would come.

A branch mill was opened in America, and Fred was asked to go out there and superintend it, with the prospect of a partnership. The opportunity was a splendid one, but he would not go. Another practical man was sent out, and Sydney was asked to go and take charge of the place for a year, and he was then to return, and remain at Frewston, with a partnership. But he would not go. These refusals would have been unaccountable if the principals had not suspected the truth. The reason was not sufficient in their estimation, but they believed it was the reason, and made other arrangements.

Perhaps rivals always think each other unworthy to possess the object of their common regard. Sydney wanted Alice for himself, but behind this great prevailing feeling there was another—he believed that Fred was of all men the least suited to her. A man in love is not the best person to choose who shall marry the object of his affection if he cannot have her himself; he probably thinks the world does not contain another who would make her happy. Love may be self-depreciative, but when it reaches its lowest point of humiliation, it has egotism enough left to blind it to the good qualities of a rival. But Sydney's judgment was not warped by prejudice only; he knew that Fred was not living the kind of life which unsophisticated people, like the Ventnors, gave him credit for.

'He goes to Grabdell a good deal,' Sydney said; 'and though his people are there, and he may pretend that he is only performing the duties which he owes to his own family, yet I know better. His brothers have a bad name in Grabdell, and he is doing nothing to make things any better.'

But whatever Sydney might say to himself on that subject, he carefully refrained from mentioning it at Ferndene. He wished that the Ventnors knew everything, but by no word or sign did he betray his opinion of Fred.

'I have heard about somebody,' he mused, 'who deliberately

took for motto, "Through indignity to dignity." That would not suit me; and I do not believe it is necessary for anybody to do wrong in order that truth may prevail.' This was brave, but it did not remove uneasiness from the heart. Sydney discovered, as many besides him have discovered, that reflections and maxims which ought to bring peace and contentment have sometimes a way of leaving those who indulge in them uneasy and dissatisfied.

Fred's opinion of Sydney was summed up in the harmless but not very pleasant word, 'milk-sop.' He had not a very high opinion of human nature, especially masculine human nature. He seemed to know his own weaknesses and to reason from himself outward.

'I am not immaculate myself,' he said, 'and I have a suspicion that nobody else is. One man stumbles over big things, and another stumbles over little ones; but stumbling is stumbling, whatever may be the cause.'

There were not two handsomer young fellows about Frewston than the two rivals. Fred Borcliffe was more strongly built than Sydney Bastow, and was darker; but Sydney had the pleasanter countenance and the more agreeable manners. They were both well educated, thanks to the kindness of Mr. Ventnor, and both had reached high and lucrative positions at Frewston Mill.

It was a terrible shock when people heard that Sydney had been robbed near Garside Wood. Frewston was almost free from crime. Burglary and highway robbery were looked upon as the misfortunes of remote places, and it never entered the minds of the inhabitants that such calamities could visit them.

Then there was the rumour started, nobody knew how or where, that it was not a real robbery but a pretended one, and that Sydney was himself the real culprit. Amos Pulp was one of the first to suggest it.

But worse followed. The robbery became associated with Nat Pepsley's disappearance. Nat, in his rambling fashion, had said something about Sydney Bastow and a robbery of fifteen hundred pounds; he had even mentioned Garside Wood. The person who gave this information had taken no notice of Nat's talk, and had forgotten it until the robbery really happened, for Nat was known to be a great romancer if he could find a listener.

Frewston was aroused, and a thorough search was made at last for the missing one.

Nat was found in the snow, not far from the bridge which

crossed Lazy Beck. He must have been dead for some days. His neck was broken; and it looked as if he had fallen from a tree, and then the snow had covered him, and kept him from sight until the thorough search was made.

CHAPTER V.

AN OPEN VERDICT.

MRS. VENTNOR'S sense of duty began to manifest itself in a very dogmatic manner when she heard the news, which seemed to rush about like something mad, and which exaggerated simple facts and supplied missing links in the chain of information. She assumed at once that Sydney had been guilty of unspeakable crimes, and that henceforth he ought to be put away from the affectionate regard of all his former friends. If the subject had not been so serious, it would have been amusing to hear the lady speak about the esteem in which she had always held Sydney; she even said to Alice:

‘I have sometimes fancied that he cared more for you than his position justified, but when I thought he was respectable and upright I never felt the least resentment against him; I did not, Alice. He is a Bastow, and your grandmother was a Bastow; I am a Boreliffe myself, and should be sorry to say that any well-conducted Bastow is not good enough for any Boreliffe in the world. I cannot tell you how much I feel this disgrace. We shall all feel it, but I think it is painning me more than anyone. I am putting him away from my heart entirely, and the wrench is dreadful. Why, Alice, he might possibly have been your——’

Mrs. Ventnor was not able to finish the sentence; the vision of past possibilities was too dreadful for words.

A faint blush passed over the pale features of Alice when she listened to her mother, and then, in a calm tone, she replied:

‘I think we had better say nothing about this subject until we know the particulars. We have heard half a dozen contradictory rumours, which cannot all be true. Perhaps they are all false.’

‘But, Alice——’

Fortunately there was a visitor announced, and the conversation was interrupted.

When we have perfect faith in the honour of our friends, we

grieve in our confidence if circumstances place them in doubtful positions, and what looks like evidence is against them.

Sydney had been robbed or he had not; either alternative was a misfortune, but, as Alice knew, the greater misfortune was not to have been robbed. But the possibility of that was never seriously entertained in her mind.

Then this talk about Nat Pepsley having said something concerning the robbery a day or two before it happened—that was bewildering. He mentioned the place and the sum. Nat's violent death was another strange circumstance.

There was enough to fill Alice's heart with sadness, though her belief in Sydney's integrity did not waver.

Fred was out of the way at this time. He had been sent unexpectedly to France by the firm, to inspect some new machinery, and he returned to Frewston on Christmas Eve, when the whole place was agitated as no inhabitant could remember it to have been agitated before.

It was a rare time for the 'Packhorse.' Men who never entered a public-house under ordinary circumstances dropped in to hear the latest news; and women who generally held public-houses in abhorrence were glad to hear what had been said, and allowed their husbands to go and have a glass of something, without favouring them with the usual tirade against drink-shops and loafers.

An inquest was held over Nat Pepsley, and, by the coroner's direction, an open verdict was returned. This open verdict was a mysterious something which filled the general public with awe, and it was discussed at the 'Packhorse' with interest which increased as the drink was consumed.

The most important witness at the coroner's inquiry was a boy called Frowden—a very quiet boy, and almost the only one in Frewston who did not join in the tricks which had been played upon Nat. He had white hair and pink eyes, and he was fond of all kinds of pets. Nat Pepsley had often caught birds for him. Frowden was teased by the boys, and that circumstance had helped to cement the friendship between him and Nat. His name was Richard, but everybody called him 'Dicky,' except the boys, and they called him 'Dickybird.'

Dicky said that on the morning of the day on which Nat disappeared he had seen him not far from the school. Nat was going to the woods, and Dicky wanted to go with him, but had to

go to school instead. Nat said something about fifteen hundred pounds being a good deal of money. Dicky agreed with him. Then Nat said something about robbery being very wrong. Dicky agreed with that. Incoherent remarks were then made about the Twisted Slope, near Garside Wood, and about Sydney Bastow; but Dicky thought Nat was rambling a bit in his mind, as he did sometimes. When the robbery took place, however, and it was at the bottom of Twisted Slope, and fifteen hundred pounds was the sum taken, and Sydney Bastow was the victim, Dicky remembered everything which Nat had said to him, and he told his mother, who speedily told her neighbours, so that in an incredibly short time it was known throughout Frewston.

Dicky was carefully questioned by the coroner, but his testimony never wavered. Nat had said that to him, every word of it, and the reason why Dicky had not mentioned it sooner was that Nat often said funny things to him. But he did not think Nat had ever said anything to him about robberies before. He did not know where the information came from. It was nearly school-time, and he was afraid of being late, so he did not stand more than a minute or two.

'Well, you have been carrying on during my absence,' said Fred Borcliffe to Mr. Anderson Bastow, one of the partners, a long-headed man, who was said to know more about the ins and outs of the business than any other member of the firm. He was usually called Mr. Anderson, as it was found necessary to use Christian names largely where so many Bastows and Borcliffes were together.

'It is a very disagreeable affair,' replied Mr. Anderson. 'If it had been anybody but Sydney, I should have suspected foul play. I do not mean that fair play accounts for what has happened; but if anybody but Sydney had been robbed, I should have thought it was a trick. There has been dirty work somewhere, and I am sorry for Sydney, because people will talk.'

Then Fred asked for the particulars, and Mr. Anderson told him all that was known.

'What will be done?' Fred asked.

'The police have it in hand,' was the reply. 'The strange part of the affair is that an idiot son of Silas Pepsley knew something about the robbery beforehand.'

'That is strange!' Fred exclaimed.

Then Mr. Anderson told him about Dicky Frowden's evidence, and Fred was deeply interested in it.

'It is strange that so much should be known, and no more,' said Fred. Then he began to talk about the machinery which he had seen in France, and the two became absorbed in matters of business.

This interview took place at the mill, and when Fred left he turned his footsteps towards his own home, a pleasant house on the way to Ferndene. It was the place which old John Bastow built for himself when he left the cottage in which he lived until his fortune was secured. Fred had a housekeeper, who had known him from childhood, a silent old woman, called Levick.

Fred looked with longing eyes towards Ferndene, and for a moment he was undecided whether to go there or not; but with reluctance he entered his own door, saying to himself, 'I must take time to think.'

Mrs. Levick might be silent with most people, and it was sometimes said that, if a still tongue makes a wise head, she ought to beat Solomon himself; but she was communicative enough to her master, and it was evident that she had a great deal to tell him, for before he had been many minutes in the house she was repeating to him all she had heard about the strange events which had happened while he was in France.

Sydney Bastow did not care to have the trouble and responsibility of a house, but he lodged with an old couple whose home he had shared since his boyhood. Moses Hellewell, with whom Sydney lodged, was a clerk at the mill; he might have been superannuated long before, but he had always asked to be kept on; his heart was in his work, and he could not bear the thought of being separated from it. Sydney had been a boy under him in the office, but Moses was never jealous of his lodger's prosperity.

'One is made for this, and another is made for that,' Moses said; 'and Sydney is made for topping us all. Let us be thankful it is him and not some folks.'

Nancy, his wife, was as proud of Sydney as her husband was; and in all Frewston there was nobody who had a better opinion of him than the two old people with whom he lived.

It was a sad blow to them when a promising career seemed blighted by an untoward accident, which had painful associations that caused people to shake their heads and say, as Amos Pulp had often said, that high climbing and far falling went together.

The police inspector who went to inquire into the case had a long interview with Sydney, and was disappointed at not obtaining more information about the robbery. Sydney said he could scarcely remember anything which had happened; the horse fell, and he was pitched out of the trap and stunned. Fortunately, there was plenty of snow on the ground, or the effect would have been more serious.

'That is a gloomy corner,' said the inspector.

'Yes, it is gloomy,' replied Sydney; 'but the horse I had with me is very sure-footed. He went down as if he was shot.'

'He was thrown down,' replied the inspector.

'Thrown down?'

'Yes; a cord of some kind was stretched across the road a few inches from the ground. I have seen the places on the trees where it was fastened, and there are marks on the horse where he struck it.'

There was a long silence after this statement, and the inspector soon took his departure. Outside the village he was joined by a rough-looking man, who had been making himself agreeable at the 'Packhorse.'

'Any news, Norton?' the inspector asked.

'Plenty of talk,' replied Norton, 'but not much in it. This Sydney Bastow seems well liked. A mouthing fool, called Pulp, does not care for him, but Pulp is a jackass. I fancy Mr. Fred Borcliffe has no love for Mr. Sydney Bastow; some love affair, I hear.'

The rough-looking man was a detective.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DRAUGHT-BOARD.

It was fortunate that Christmas holidays lasted a week at Frewston, for if the people had been expected to work while the excitement was at its height there would certainly have been accidents among the machinery. Everybody who could possibly get out of doors went to see the funeral of Nat Pepsley; and many expostulations were addressed to George Cawlishaw and his companions about the cruelty of tormenting those whom God had afflicted. A subscription was also started to pay the expenses of

the funeral and provide a monument which might be erected over Nat's grave.

Sarah Midgebought smoked a great deal of tobacco in those days, and acknowledged that Frewston reminded her of Leeds and Manchester; it was becoming lively, and there was something to talk about. Ann Gowden's hair seemed bewitched, and it came loose more frequently than ever. Eunice Kirk, however, appeared to think that as most things were unsettled it was her duty to hold fast by her favourite system of rigid neatness, so she went about tidier than her oldest friend had ever seen her before, and she gave utterance to sharper criticisms and more crushing rejoinders as wild talk became wilder and vague rumours became vaguer. Silas and Betty Pepsley received many visits and much condolence. Perhaps the women who expressed most sorrow for Nat's untimely end were those who had previously said it would be a good thing if his parents were relieved of the burden of his support. Betty put her left hand over her mouth and looked bewildered; but Silas thrust both his hands into his pockets and, shaking his head, remarked:

'If th' meat's bad it's bad, and more sauce doesn't mend it. Put your talk in one scale and a graveyard in the other. Then where are you?'

The gossips arrived at the conclusion that some people receive consolation very badly.

Business continued good at the 'Packhorse,' and Amos Pulp received more gratuitous drinks than ever. He said it reminded him of Christmas in the good old times. He had made a song about Nat Pepsley, and sang it to a very melancholy tune, and the customers were never tired of hearing it. The song was based on the idea that Nat had been murdered, and was very valuable on that account, because there was no evidence in favour of the opinion, and the song supplied the missing link.

But the hero of the time was Dicky Frowden. If Dicky had been allowed to attend the 'Packhorse' he might have had drink enough to swim in, as Amos Pulp said, who was inclined to sneer at the popularity of a boy, especially a boy without poetic gifts. In Dicky's absence Siah Frowden, the boy's father, became an important person for the first time in his life.

George Cawlishaw felt himself at a disadvantage. Why did not Nat tell him about the robbery, instead of a bird-keeping, mouse-catching simpleton like Dicky Frowden? George could

break a nail with his teeth, and on that account had often tasted the sweets of popular attention; it was only natural, therefore, that he should become morose when he found himself passed by in the turmoil and interest of the all-pervading theme. It was whispered among the boys that Nat's ghost haunted Garside Wood, and that henceforth it would be impossible for them to play in their old favourite spot, where they had gathered bluebells, nuts, and acorns. George sneered at this, and declared that he would visit the place oftener than ever. His companions looked sceptical, so in a boastful manner he started for the wood, and promised to bring the ghost back with him.

The rough man, called Norton, who had the interview with Inspector Thorn, of the county constabulary, was also fond of prowling about Garside Wood.

'That bag must have weighed the best part of a hundred-weight,' he said, 'considering how much silver there was with the gold. You cannot put a hundredweight in your eye, and hide it with a pair of spectacles. Thorn thinks this young swell who was robbed is all straight and square. If so, where did the bag go to? No carriage or cart left Frewston that night, or entered it either, except the young swell's gig. If he is straight and square, either the money was divided among a lot, who walked off with it, or it was hidden somewhere. I cannot hear about a party being seen on the roads; there were odd ones here and there, as usual, but no parties, and they generally stick pretty closely together. It is a bit queer the young swell had no groom with him. Gave up taking the groom a month or two since.'

Norton went to the bottom of Twisted Slope, as he had often done before, and he examined the trees on both sides.

'That horse was thrown,' he said. 'A fellow would hardly do that for a blind. Of course, the snow made it easy falling, but a fellow would hardly do it for a blind; he might have killed the horse or broken his own neck. No, the proper way is to get your friends to stop you, and tie your hands behind you, and tear your clothes, as if you had struggled your hardest. That's the proper game, but this looks different. Somebody in Frewston must have done it, or that idiot could not have known anything about it. His father seems all right, and his mother too.'

Norton strolled back into the wood. Before he reached the bridge which crossed Lazy Beck he saw a boy standing near the place where Nat Pepsley's body had been found. Norton stood

perfectly still, and watched the boy, who was gazing intently at the top of an ivy-covered trunk.

The boy was George Cawlishaw, and he was carrying out the threat which he had made in a spirit of bravado to his companions. If they had seen him they would have fancied that he expected to find Nat's ghost at the top of the tree. But George saw some robins, and they appeared to be dead; and he was scheming to get them, that he might show them to the boys, and boast that he had fetched them down from the very tree off which Nat had fallen.

George found the best place for climbing, and in a few minutes he had reached the robins, which he threw down upon the snow below. Then he threw several other articles, and carefully descended. When he regained the solid earth he found a rough-looking man examining the things.

'Them's mine,' said George.

'If I had a pipe and tobacco I should not keep them at the top of a tree,' replied the man.

'That was Nat Pepsley's pipe,' George replied, 'I've seen him with it many a time; and that was his bacca, and that was his birdlime, and he must have limed the twigs which caught these robins; and they're all mine because I've found them.'

'I see,' replied Norton; 'that part of the mystery is explained. Nat was up there liming twigs and going to have a quiet smoke. A fit came on, and down he comes. Was there anything else up there?'

George shook his head, and held out his hands for the treasures.

But Norton was examining the foot of the trunk, where the ivy clustered very thickly on one side. He removed the snow, and found that behind the ivy there was a hole. It was too narrow for him to pass, but he looked inside, and noticed that light entered it through a smaller opening above.

'Quite a treasure-house,' he said, reaching forward, and seizing a small box, which on examination was found to contain a set of draughts-men.

'Let me go inside,' George exclaimed.

'All right, my boy,' replied Norton.

George went through the hole, but found nothing except a draught-board, which he handed to Norton.

Underneath the board a great number of small fragments of

writing paper had been stuck with birdlime ; and Norton saw at a glance that a letter had been torn to pieces, and then put together again, and fastened on the draught-board. It did not take him long to read the letter, and when it was finished he said to George :

‘ We must share this stuff. I will have the draught-board, and you can have all the other things, but don’t say a word about it to anybody. You hear what I say—not a word, or it will be worse for you. Now give me your name and address.’

This was rather startling, but George gave his name and address ; he also promised in the most earnest manner that he would not breathe a syllable to any living mortal about what he had done and seen.

‘ Keep your mouth absolutely shut,’ said Norton, ‘ and it will be a good job for you ; but if you blab I don’t know what may happen.’

George promised again, and through Norton’s advice he hid his share of Nat’s treasures in the wood, that he might not have to account for the possession of them ; then he hurried back to the village.

He fully intended to keep his promise, and tried very hard to do so ; but the effort was really too great, and before long it was known throughout Frewston that a secret hiding-place had been found in the wood, and that among other things which it contained was a draught-board, at the back of which were a great number of bits of paper, which had been stuck on with birdlime, and that the bits of paper made a letter.

George had not been able to read anything of the letter except the first two words, and they were ‘ Dear Roy.’ But what George was unable to reveal the imagination of the people supplied, and wild rumours were soon in circulation.

George gained the desire of his heart, and became a hero at length, but, like other famous people, he found that celebrity has its bitters as well as its sweets. Many questions were asked by the inquisitive neighbours, and he gradually formed a complete story, which appeared to account for everything and to satisfy his hearers. The only thing which puzzled him was the name Roy, so he pretended that he had given solemn promises not to tell who was really meant by that name.

Even as far away as Ferndene the rumours travelled. The robbery was to be accounted for. Satisfaction filled the hearts of

Mrs. Ventnor and Annie. Mrs. Ventnor was convinced that when the truth was known her daughter would perceive the absurdity of defending Sydney Bastow any longer, and would give some encouragement to Fred Borcliffe; Alice needed something to fill her with a sense of duty, and this discovery was likely to have the desired effect. But Alice was thinking everything would be explained, and Sydney's name cleared for ever of the doubtful circumstances which in some people's opinion had stained it.

Fred Borcliffe was away, but Mrs. Levick, his housekeeper, heard the news, and started at once for Holdworth, the nearest railway station.

Sydney Bastow was very moody and miserable; but when Moses Hellewell told him what people were saying, he put on his hat and coat and went straight to George Cawlishaw's home, that he might learn what had really occurred.

As Susan Midgebout said, 'Frewston was waking up; it was becoming as lively as Leeds or Manchester.'

CHAPTER VII.

THE PIECED LETTER.

THE letter which Nat Pepsley had collected with such care from the slowly moving waters of Lazy Beck afforded him the kind of task which he liked to perform, and which he was as well able to accomplish as anybody in Frewston. It must have occupied him during many tedious hours, but he had succeeded in putting together, bit by bit, the many fragments which he had found. There were several portions missing, but they did not prevent the letter being read. Nat's box of birdlime had served him in the place of glue, and by its aid he had managed to fasten the paper under his draught-board, and had studied the restored message to the best of his ability. He could both read and write, but had not been fond of doing either. As he said to his parents, he did not know what to write, and reading made his head ache. Still he had deciphered the letter, and had learnt from it that Sydney Bastow was to be robbed of fifteen hundred pounds; but instead of making the fact known publicly, he had asked questions and given hints to Dicky Frowden, as if he could not quite understand the secret which he had discovered. It was to be at the bottom of

Twisted Slope; Nat whispered that to Dicky, and then looked to see what effect the communication would have. Dicky cared more about a squirrel which Nat had seen in the wood. Then Nat appeared to think there was something wrong about the story he had told, and he repeated it to nobody else.

The letter was written on a blank memorandum form, and was as follows:—

‘Dear Roy,—I have to go to France at once, and shall be away a week. Sydney Bastow will be at the bottom of Twisted Slope next Tuesday, at about four o’clock. Fifteen hundred pounds, I believe. The cord will throw the horse, but be sure and remove it afterwards. Do not injure Sydney if you can avoid it. I want it to look as if there had been no robbery. Get the bag without him seeing you if possible. You must bind him if necessary. Remember, the north side of the bridge, in Garside Wood, the end nearest the road. Do not open the bag or touch the money. See that Jack and Hugh do not make fools of themselves. You must not remain at Frewston. Mrs. Levick will give you this, but she knows you will not stay. Be very careful to destroy this letter. I shall be at Grabdell on Christmas Day.

‘FRED.’

It did not take Norton long to master the contents of the note, and to perceive what light it threw upon the case which he was investigating. The reference to the north side of the bridge in Garside Wood made him anxious to be rid of George Cawlishaw, for he fancied that the bag had been dropped in the water there, and he wanted to investigate. But he was sorry afterwards that he had not kept George with him, because secrecy was necessary.

On the north side of the bridge, and at the end nearest the road, Norton found the water of Lazy Beck rather deep—so deep that he could not reach the bottom with his stick, though he lay on the bridge and stretched his arm to the utmost.

‘Safe bind, safe find,’ he muttered; ‘nobody is likely to make any accidental discoveries there. I must go and see a magistrate. The case is as clear as daylight against those Grabdell Borcliffes. I know Mr. Fred has three brothers there, Roy, Jack, and Hugh; and a bright lot they are.’

Norton had spent a considerable time in the wood; but he secured the draught-board, and called first to see Inspector Thorn.

Then he discovered that George Cawlishaw had already broken his promise, and that all kinds of wild rumours were in circulation among the people.

When Inspector Thorn saw the letter on the draught-board he looked serious and expressed his great sorrow.

'That is bringing the matter home with a vengeance,' he said. 'Why, Mr. Fred Borcliffe is one of the rising men in Frewston. He ranks next to the principals themselves, and is expected to be a partner one of these days.'

Norton cared nothing about that. The man-hunting instinct was strong within him, and when a job was put in his hands he liked to make a good finish of it.

'You had better take this draught-board to Mr. Anderson Bastow—he is a magistrate,' said Norton, 'and get warrants out for the apprehension of the four brothers, and I will take a man or two with me, and see whether or not the bag is in that stream.'

'A man or two!' Nearly all the adult males in Frewston, besides many persons who were neither adults nor males, accompanied Norton to make his search. The task was neither long nor difficult. By means of poles and hooks it was soon discovered that a heavy substance was in the stream at the place indicated. Without delay it was brought to the surface, and seen to be a black leather bag, and it was very heavy. Sydney Bastow was present, and he recognised it at once as the bag which contained the lost money.

Three cheers were given for the bag, three for Sydney, three for Norton, three for George Cawlishaw, three for Nat Pepsley; and then somebody said, 'Three more for Mr. Sydney Bastow, the finest man in Frewston, and an ornament to the human race.' The speaker was Amos Pulp. Many of the spectators had heard Amos express sentiments of a very different character, but they did not like to refuse the applause, so they gave three cheers, and then tumbled Amos into the stream.

'I shall soon begin to think that Frewston beats either Leeds or Manchester for life and excitement,' said Susan Midgebout the next day, when she and her friends were talking over recent events.

'I always knew that Frewston had something in it,' replied Ann Gowden, who had ceased to fasten up her hair, inasmuch as the comb was lost, and she had no intention of getting another.

But commotions seemed to make Eunice Kirk tidier than she had ever been in her life. As the people said, she had not a pin out of place, and her tongue was sharper than ever.

'You talk as if it was a credit to anybody,' she said. 'Now we shall be the talk of the whole world, and Frewston will be called a den of thieves. Remember that Mr. Fred was a Borcliffe, and his brothers were Borcliffes; and they will all be transported for life.'

But Eunice Kirk was wrong. Fred and his brothers were never brought to justice. Mrs. Levick, when she heard about a letter which began 'Dear Roy,' suspected that something was wrong, especially when she knew that the letter was associated with the name of Nat Pepsley, who in some mysterious way had learnt something about the robbery. How far she was in her master's secrets nobody could tell. But she made the best of her way to Graddell, and informed the brothers about the reports which were being circulated in Frewston.

The result was, in the highly graphic language of Norton when he referred to the case afterwards, 'the birds flew away before it was possible to put any salt upon their tails.'

Fred and his brothers disappeared, and were never seen in Yorkshire again. Mrs. Levick also left Frewston, and the opinion of the women was that if she did not know more than she cared to say she was unspeakably ignorant. 'She was as mum as a mouse, and she had not a word to throw to a dog.' That was the summary which Frewston gossips uttered in reference to Mrs. Levick.

After a while the opinion gained ground that Fred had never intended that the money which was taken from Sydney should be really appropriated by either himself or his brothers.

'I can see it all,' said Mr. Anderson Bastow to his fellow-partners. 'Fred wanted to put Sydney under a cloud. He succeeded too—not with me, but with some people. I remember quite well that the remark was made to me at the time, "If it were not Sydney it would look bad." I forget who said it, but somebody did. Mind you this: I don't think Alice Ventnor knew which of the two she liked best, Fred or Sydney—I don't indeed. If Fred's plan had succeeded he would have married Alice, as sure as we are here. That is her mother's opinion too. And now we know how it is to be. Such is life!'

Mr. Anderson Bastow was wrong, and Mrs. Ventnor was wrong. Alice would not have married Fred—at least, that is what she said afterwards, and if she did not know, who did? She said she never doubted Sydney, and though she might never have married him, yet she would not have married anybody else. She never doubted him. How could she doubt him? Nevertheless her heart was very sore when the rumours and suspicions were rife.

It was amusing to see how Mrs. Ventnor's sense of duty came to her assistance when Fred was disgraced and Sydney was cleared.

‘Really, I think, Alice, that Sydney ought to be encouraged,’ she said to her daughter one day; ‘he has laboured under very unjust suspicions. Your father was very fond of him, you know.’

This was when all the winter snow had passed away, and the early flowers were writing the promise of spring in gay tints upon the earth.

Alice did not speak, she only blushed. She knew, what her mother would soon know, that Sydney had been encouraged.

MARTENS, POLECATS, WEASELS, AND STOATS.

THE *marten*, or, as he is sometimes called, the marten cat, is the largest and most handsome of this family. From the nose to the tip of his tail he measures about 2 feet 7 inches; his limbs are stout and strong, his colour a rich dark brown with either a patch of white or yellow under the throat. In some parts he rejoices in the name of Sweet Marten, because there is not that peculiar odour about him which distinguishes the rest of his tribe. His general appearance reminds one of a small, low-legged, dark-coloured fox, his tail too being bushy. He is equally at home on the ground or in the trees, and is a first-rate runner and jumper. Sometimes he will make his place of abode on the stony hill-side, where only scrub thorns and brambles grow; then again he will make himself a home high up in the trees, in the old deserted nest of a crow or a hawk.

According to some writers, he has been extinct in England for some years. I venture to doubt this statement for very good reasons. It is wonderful what the coin commonly called a 'sov.' will bring to light at times in the rough broken ground of the border counties—genuine British creatures too, not caged ones imported and then let loose and killed.

His nimbleness and size and strength make him a sad foe to game of all kinds; to hares—the common and the mountain hare—rabbits, and even to lambs, the shepherds will tell you. They always put their swift-footed collies on his track whenever they see him. Capercaillie, black grouse, red grouse, and any other bird that comes in his way, are included in his bill of fare. In Scotland he holds his own in spite of persecution which he undergoes from the keepers of the forests right down to the herd laddie. He has a violent affection for the capercaillie or cock of the woods. Running out of his hiding-place under some shattered fragments of rock scattered about, his rounded ears listen most attentively. It is the call or play of the cock of the woods, performed for the exclusive pleasure of his female admirers, that the marten hears. It must come from some spot in the pine forest close at hand. Very quietly going to work, he leaves the ground when he gets nearer to the tree which the sound comes

from, and, climbing the great trunk of a fir with the agility of a squirrel, he runs along the branches that touch and interlace one with another. Presently he pauses and listens; he is now close to a dead fir, and on one of its bare limbs a little below him a fine capercaillie cock sits, singing his love-song, his head thrown up, wings trailed, and his broad tail outspread like a fan and held well up over his back. The whole of his feathers are ruffled, those under his chin being raised and puffed out. His song is composed of harsh, grating gulps and sounds, something like 'Peller! peller!' but it absorbs him entirely, and his imagination has caused him to forget his instinct of self-preservation, for the marten is close up, hidden by some of the dead limbs. Once more the bird holds forth, and, as he raises his head and with half-closed eyes gives the last note—or, rather, gulp—of his dreamland song, the marten leaps on his back and has his teeth in his throat and his powerful forefeet round it in an instant. The great bird flaps off the limb where he has sung for the last time and flaps down to the foot of the tree, the marten still holding tight to him. Before the startled 'Gok! gok! gok!' of his female admirers is lost in the distance, the poor capercaillie is a dead bird and a meal for the marten and his family.

Even the squirrel does not escape when he condescends to notice such small quarry. To poultry he is destruction itself; once let him gain entrance to the henhouse of some lonely glen farm, and he will slaughter the lot for the mere pleasure of the thing. Hares and rabbits he tracks and captures without the least trouble. He is swift of foot, and his agility is aided by the stupid terror these creatures have when pursued by him or any other of his tribe. Hares will run from foxes or dogs as only hares can run; rabbits are equally swift for a short run of a few hundred yards; but just let one of the weasel family get on their track, as they are sure to do if the chance offers, and the hare or rabbit, as soon as he finds out what his pursuer is, becomes half numb with deadly fear. In the case of most of the weasel tribe it is the pungent scent which betrays them, but this does not apply so much to the marten.

I have often watched rabbits hunted in this way, and it is impossible to mistake their cry of terror if you have once heard it, or to forget the bewildered look of the creature and its limping gait. It will pass close to you, shrieking as it disappears in the cover. Close on its track follows the enemy, bounding along in

the chase, hunting, like the hound, by scent. The end will soon come. The stoat has passed so close that we could have kicked him up in the air as he went by had we felt inclined to do so. Listen! He has closed with the rabbit. Two cries ring out close at hand; on reaching the place they proceed from, we find the stoat has fastened on to him close under the ear, and the rabbit is dead.

The beautiful fur of the marten is valued as an article of commerce. The principal supply comes to the furriers from the Continent, where he has his stronghold and attains his largest growth and greatest beauty of coat. The vast forests and rocks give him shelter and provide him with food to his taste. There he lives and multiplies, and is, comparatively speaking, unmolested. In the winter his fur is in the finest condition, when the howl of the wolf comes from his stronghold and the quick yelping bark of the fox sounds sharp on the ear. Then that very wary bird, the full-grown, full-plumaged black cock will have to sleep with one eye open if the marten finds out where he has perched for the night.

He varies his hunting tactics to suit his purposes. In the depths of the forest some mighty pines, fallen through decay, have formed a natural stronghold for him. In their fall they have brought others down, causing a considerable opening. Coming from his home beneath one of the huge fallen trunks, he climbs up to the top of one of the dead limbs and listens attentively for the slightest sound of any living creature. Snow, the forerunner of winter, has sprinkled the ground, and he knows that rabbits are likely to find their way to these open spots between the tangled limbs of the fallen trees. A gurgling cackle comes to his ears through the clear night air—another unearthly solo, and again a bark. It does not disturb him, for he has heard it many times before. The cry of the eagle-owl it is, before that mighty hunter starts on the wing. The marten watches most intently, for he expects to see the owl come near where he is watching. His surmises are right, for here the bird comes, rising and falling on his grand pinions, now gliding one way, then with the next movement falling almost to the ground. He seems now lost to view, but the marten does not move from his seat; he seems to listen more intently than before. Again that goblin solo and the bark are heard, and after that another sound—a scuffling rustle—which moves him. He is down the limb and on the trunk in an

instant, his body crouched and his sharp eyes peering out to catch a glimpse of a possible supper.

Two rabbits come dotting into one of the open spaces between the limbs. The marten could easily make his way nearer to them; but that is not his intention. The snow is just deep enough to show a footprint, nothing more. In this state it suits the rabbits exactly; they bound over each other, and frisk about, scuffling the snow up with their hind feet in little powdery clouds; sitting up now and then to wipe the particles of snow from their faces and ears. Now they are off again for a final frolic before settling down to feed. Under and over the crushed limbs of the fallen pines they jump and rush, making the twigs crack and snap and rustle. The marten hears the racket; he has changed his position again, and instead of crouching on the top he is at the bottom, his sharp eyes and nose peering from between the dead twigs. The unearthly solo sounds again from some tree near at hand, followed by two barks in quick time one after another echoed by the little owl perched on a twig of one dead limb, where he has been gabbling for some time as only a little owl can. The giant of the same tribe sends his barking notes over the tree-tops, shrilly answered by his dwarf relative who, not to be outdone in the matter, puffs out the feathers of his throat, and yelps his loudest. This is too much for the bunnies; others of their family got into trouble one night when that solo was heard, and they have not forgotten it.

The play is ended; they make for the open space at once, which was just what the eagle-owl intended them to do, for he is perched on a limb close to the place they have rushed to. Now he has a full view of the pair as they sit upon their hind limbs and listen, their ears cocked up and twitching. The owl now crouches on his perch for one moment, his great eyes blazing with the fiery excitement that he feels at the sight of his expected prey. Swoop! and he has one. But that dead bough has balked him, and he has the rabbit by his ears and poll, instead of that fatal grip round the loins. He lifts the little animal shrieking with fear off the ground however; the rabbit draws himself up bowbacked, and kicks out his hardest with his hind limbs; he will surely kick himself free. The marten thinks so, for he rushes from his hiding-place, the hairs on his neck and tail bristled, and makes for the two struggling creatures.

If the place was a more open one the owl would lose his clutch,

and drop his quarry in order to get a surer hold, but the kicking jerks from the rabbit in that small place of action have brought the pair in collision with the tangled dead limbs already. Swearing like a cat, the marten leaps and runs now here, now there, as the great owl flaps up and down with his unwilling captive. With a long shriek, and one more desperate fling from his hind limbs, the rabbit frees himself, and drops to the ground to find himself in the grip of the marten ! who, with one bite at the back of his neck, kills him at once. Such instances are not by any means rare. I have frequently noticed that one creature flying or running to save its life from one pursuer has met with death from another that has not hunted it.

The marten shares the forest with the wild cat, the lynx, the fox, and the wolf. General readers may not be aware that up to this present year of 1889 the wolf is a most terrible foe to the flock of the Breton peasant. Anyone familiar with these diminutive sheep, which are not much larger than a good hare, may guess that more than one would be required to stop a gap in the stomach of a grey, gaunt wolf as large as a Newfoundland dog. During the dread winter months they are taken into their shepherd's hut for the night for shelter ; one he has built for himself in the side of some bank, the sloping roof covered with heath. Sometimes the wolves will even scratch a hole through this, and kill and eat the small sheep without attempting to attack the human inmates.

When they are pressed by hunger they will do like other creatures, satisfy their cravings at some considerable risk.

I remember once seeing a pack of foxhounds, in trying for a fox, pass through a rabbit warren of great extent, and then not only I, but many others, witnessed a curious sight. The hounds caught the rabbits as they squatted in fear in the furze clumps. A feeble squeak ; two hounds were at work, one pulling at the fore, one at the hind part, and the rabbit vanished out of sight like magic. A similar performance takes place when three or four wolves break through and clear off the small sheep of the unhappy Breton peasant ; some of them do not own more than half a dozen of the tiny creatures. As to poultry, it is quite out of the question in many localities for him to keep any. The marten would kill and drag them off to his stronghold. The peasants do not destroy these hungry persecutors, because the wolf there, like our fox here, has an acknowledged protection thrown over him. It is a vague

one, but it exists, or he would have been exterminated in some districts long ago.

The *Polecat*, fitchet or foumart—the last name certainly the abbreviation of foul marten—resembles his relative closely in form and colour. The odour of his fur is stronger and he is a much smaller animal, only measuring one foot five inches in length. He is, however, strongly made, very active, nocturnal in his habits as a rule, and very ferocious. That country called ‘no man’s land’ suits him best. Bare moorland with stone-wall boundaries running over it in parts dividing different spots of sheep-grazing ground; loose stones placed one on the other without anything to hold them beyond their own weight and the way they are built. North-country hedges these are pleasantly called. The cracks and crannies in them are the favourite hiding-places of the polecat, for, unless the shepherd’s collies catch him away from home or the warrener’s terriers chance to find him, he lives his life out, there, in peace and comfort. Anyone who has seen a large, dark-coloured ferret, commonly called a polecat ferret, has seen a polecat to all intents and purposes.

Strange to say, the localities where I have known him to be fairly numerous were not game-preserving localities; the birds you saw there in the greatest numbers were crows, hooded crows, jackdaws, jays, and magpies; in my own native county, flat and damp as it is in many parts, he was, when I lived there, only too common an animal. It was not unusual to hear some one say, ‘Terrible work in my henhouse last night, neighbour, but I’ve got him.’ The walls there were called wet ones, dykes in plain terms. On the northern upland moors and on the sides of a wooded hill in a southern county he is quite at home; and he is so too in the marshlands. He can find food there in the greatest abundance; game of all kinds, poultry when he can get it, rats, mice, birds, and fish at any risk. His fishing accomplishments have been specially remarked; why, I do not know, for many other animals will kill and eat fish; the domestic dog and cat, also the fox and the whole of the weasel tribe do it. He varies his diet as all creatures like to do. During the hot summer nights the eels lie half out of the dykes on the wet margins; it is easy for him to get one when the dew is thick on the grass, and it is rarely otherwise in the marshes. The eels will crawl from one dyke to another like so many snakes. One bite at the back of the neck, enough to stupefy but not to kill, he gives; and he

packs his fish with other things that are intended for his larder, as he has a family to provide for at that season. Some may ask how he gets eels in the winter. Easily enough; any eel-spearer, and I must plead guilty to having joined in that sport, can tell you.

The dykes at the flow of the tide are filled daily; if all goes well the eels bury themselves in the mud, but if ice has formed, some of them get carried along on the top of the ice instead of underneath it; and these, when the tide ebbs, get numb with cold. Eels will also gather at the air-holes where some of the dykes empty direct into the tideway, commonly called drains; there, as they gather half-numbed for the sake of getting fresh air, the polecat is sure to hook one out from under the edge of the ice, perhaps not more than half an inch in thickness, but more than sufficiently strong to bear his weight. The fisher-lads often see his tracks in the ooze if they do not see him, for the tide never flows up without leaving something behind it. Besides which the fisher-folk generally shake all worthless fish out of their nets on to the flats, under the comprehensive name of muck, before hanging up the nets to dry. So the polecat is sure to get a bit of fish of some kind or other when he hunts on the salt flats.

The marsh farmers, who hold very small grazing farms, trouble little about him so long as he does not work them mischief; but some morning on going to the henhouse a farmer finds his black-breasted game-cock or his duck-winged one dead on the floor and some of the hens with him; then he swears dire vengeance on the polecat that has sneaked in somehow, climbed the perches, and murdered them as they slept. These birds are highly valued because, when they are out on the run and the chickens are just hatched out, no marsh hawk or gull will venture to make a dash at them if their protector is there. The birds are from the best blood. And here I will reveal a little secret: if a more than usually vicious enemy is seen flying about, the game-cock has steel spurs fixed on him when running with the fowls: on reaching home his spurs are taken off. Anyone that has handled one of these courageous birds will understand the simple process. The mischief in this case, however, has been done, and the farmer means to punish the offender, if possible, by killing him. Going to a corner, he takes from it a long stout pole about six feet in length, pointed at the thickest

end, called in this locality a stake. Grasping this by the middle, he walks off with it, calling Bob! 'Hi, Bob!' A rough-coated bob-tailed sheep-dog bounds up to him. His master will tell you Bob can do everything but speak to him. 'On to him, boy!' and Bob is on after him, for he has hit the trail off at once. Followed by his master, he runs and stops at a dry drain under a log bridge used when the waters are out. There he sniffs: the polecat has run through it if he is not there now. 'Hi, Bob, look out!' No need to tell him that. Now the use of that pole is seen, for it is poked into the old drain, where it digs and rattles at a rate that would bolt twenty polecats if they were hiding in it. 'On, old boy, find him!' The dog makes for a low shelter thatched with reeds, close to the farm, which is used in hard weather for the sheep that remain in the marshes. When the farmer overtakes him there, he finds Bob at work with his broad forepaws at a hole close to one of the inner posts that support the roof.

'Speak to him, boy! What is it? Rat, eh?' The dog pauses in his uptearing proceedings, and looks out from the tangled hair which partly covers his great brown eyes into his master's face, gives a growl, as much as to say, 'Don't talk like a fool if you can help it,' and goes on with his digging at a furious rate. 'Steady, old boy, steady!' says the farmer, as he goes to another hole a short distance further on. He drives his stake into that and proceeds as he did at the drain. This time his energetic movements are rewarded and his nose—to use his own expression—'reg'larly abominated,' for, after that gorging meal the farmer's poultry had afforded the polecat, he does not like being disturbed in such unceremonious fashion, and does his best to merit the title Linnaeus gave him of *Mustela putorius*. Bob now winds him and instantly stands perfectly still, with his head a little on one side, listening intently. That rattling with the pole from side to side goes on, threatening to cause earthquake in the polecat's burrow, so he decides to quit—not in a hurry, but in a business-like manner. He pokes his vicious-looking head out to find a larger one than his own anxious to play a game of 'chinchopper' with him.

Bob makes a snap and misses; the polecat makes a snap in return, but he too misses. Bob gets something, however; he snaps at a mouthful of litter that is near the hole, and this does not at all improve the old boy's temper. All at once Bob leaves

the hole and rushes, with a roaring bark of rage, to the other end of the shed, for the polecat, perfumed up to his eyebrows, has slipped out at another hole and is clawing his way up the rough boards of the side. The farmer has seen it as quickly as Bob; rushing up, he swings his stake round his head and comes down 'bang!' across the beast's back, making it drop right into Bob's capacious mouth. Bob gives it one worry and then drops it for his master to carry home by the tail to the barn, where he will nail it up.

I have seen much of these sagacious dogs in my wanderings over the marshes. Their thick woolly coats, grey in colour, are a most complete protection to them in the bitter winter time. The long hair reaches down the legs as far as the toes. In the summer their masters shear them as they do the sheep, and then they stand forth in all their naked truth—long, stout-limbed, bob-tailed lurchers. The breed is in existence now, to my certain knowledge, though some may doubt the fact. They will herd sheep or horned cattle, kill a rat or catch a hare, stand at a snipe or plover, and for the purposes of retrieving they are as good as the best water spaniels and far more powerful when they swim, at racing speed, in the tide that runs on the flats. Under certain conditions and influences they are high-mettled dogs, and slow to anger as a rule, but when roused they are desperate fighters. Those who are versed in dog-lore can give a shrewd guess how the breed originated. I have known them run and kill hares when their coats were at their thickest. It is a long jump from the weasel tribe to the dogs, but I could not introduce the death of this most vicious member of his tribe and leave Bob out of the hunt. Between him and me there was a great personal friendship.

That beautiful and active little animal, the stoat or ermine, is 1 foot 3 inches in length from tip of nose to end of tail as a rule, though his size varies a little. In the summer his fur is a warm red colour above and cream-white below, the tip of his tail black. If the weather is hard he will change to a creamy white, the tip of his tail excepted. In that condition it forms the ermine fur of commerce. He is as bold as his larger relatives and far more dashing and active than the polecat. Stony places covered with thorns and brambles suit him best, and before those grand old hedges were grubbed up to make way for our modern scientific system of farming the ermines used to make their home there in small colonies. Mice, rats, and our common birds of the fields

and hedgerows must have formed the principal portion of their food. I have never heard any complaints from the small farmers and cottagers about them, and, considering the numbers I have known hunt round about some spots, the mischief done by them was very inconsiderable. The ermine will kill game if it comes in his way, but the rabbit is more to his taste, and he must have been a friend to the farmer before the Ground Act came into force, for a rabbit that has been killed by a stoat is good eating and very white in flesh—that I can answer for. He kills them neatly too, and cleanly. He is quite at home on the limbs and branches of trees; many a nest will he rifle and then curl himself up in it to sleep off the effects of a meal of tender young birds. He is apt to gorge to excess at times. His prey he hunts with the 'go' of a foxhound. Shoot him dead as he comes bounding along, and his fur will be as sweet as you could wish it; get him into close quarters, as I have done more than once, and you will feel inclined to quit him. The far-famed skunk of North America is not the only animal that can make you wish that you had let him alone. If you kill any of the tribe when they are enraged and at close quarters, the fur will retain the abominable odour for months—that of the marten alone excepted.

The nimble little weasel is the smallest of his tribe, only measuring ten and three-quarter inches. His colour is like that of the stoat, except that his tail is always the same colour as his upper parts, and red. White varieties have occurred, but I have never seen any white weasels in the hard winters.

There is a small kind of weasel called the Cain, Kane, or mouse-killer, that I have often seen. The rustics have called him by that name from my earliest recollections, which go a long way back. He is very small, not much longer than the short-tailed mouse that he feeds on. Naturalists have not yet determined what he is—a variety, or a small separate species; it does not matter. I have seen him and the common weasel come on to the velvety lawn of a country house, and play there the most extraordinary antics, their sole object being the capture of some wagtails that were running nimbly about, catching insects at every tumble and vault. They managed to get nearer to the birds, and their movements were so rapid that they looked like strips of india-rubber being thrown about. Their little game was successful, for when one had got near enough he vanished behind a clump of flowers until the bird tripped by, then he had him in

a flash, while his companion played the same little game with another. All the weasel tribe practise more or less the little ruse of so taking up the attention of their quarry by their strange antics that they may get near enough for a final rush when their prey is in any open space.

Small as the weasel is, he is just as destructive, considering his size, as that largest of the family, the marten. The whole tribe are bloodthirsty, and yet I have been surprised, in a long and close acquaintance with them, to see the little harm they do, bearing in mind their great destructive powers. In all the barren spots covered with loose stones that I have examined, I found mice were abundant, and so were certain birds and other creatures. And yet polecats, stoats, and weasels were found there too, in numbers varying according to the locality. Game, as I said before, was not preserved then, and it was only occasionally that you heard of mischief being done at any of the outlying cottages or farms. They fed, undoubtedly, on mice, rats, and birds, and in some instances on vermin more to be feared than themselves.

A 'DISCARDED' SUIT.

To my Long Suit you pay no attention at all,
 The way that you Deal with me's hard ;
 I find it is utterly useless to Call,
 For you never pay heed to my Card.

I relied on my Queen, all too blindly 'tis true,
 But the blunder was not on my part :
 I could give you no Diamonds, that you well knew ;
 But how could I tell you'd no Heart ?

I sacrificed all for the sake of your Hand,
 I even abandoned my Club ;
 But all to no purpose ! you don't understand,
 And as Hamlet would say, 'There's the Rub.'

You want an Establishment ? once you averred
 You would follow my Lead anywhere ;
 And for once you spoke truth when you said you preferred
 Whitechapel to Cavendish Square.

Well ! I'm wiser in several Points than I was,
 Your Shuffling's no longer of use :
 I thought I could count on your Honour ; alas !
 You repaid me by playing the Deuce.

IN A CLEFT STICK.

A LONELY hamlet in the depths of a Moravian pine forest. It consists of but five low cottages, built of rough stones and thatched with straw. For light the peasants burn pine-logs upon the hearth. The flickering gleam of their red flames shines through the small windows, and is lost in the gloom of the forest. The summer night is dark with clouds, and the moon has not yet risen. The wind sighs softly over the tops of the pines, otherwise all around reigns the completest stillness.

In a small room in one of the cottages, five men sit round a rough table, playing cards by the light of the pine-logs, and smoking short wooden pipes. They are, all of them, of middle age, between forty and fifty, browned with the sun and the wind. Their beardless faces are covered with wrinkles, and their bristling hair is cut short. They wear roughly-knitted, home-made jerseys, and are bare-footed.

In a corner of the room, a woman sits on a wide bed, rocking with her foot a cradle in which a baby is asleep. Two bigger children sleep on the bed behind her. The woman has a rosary in her hands and is telling her beads. The men do not speak, except when the game requires it. They are playing for marks only, which they make with a piece of chalk upon the table. The monotonous amusement lasts an hour or two. Meanwhile the woman has laid herself down on the bed, and gone to sleep.

At length the old, smoke-stained wooden clock strikes eleven with a dull sound, resembling that of a cracked glass. As if at a word of command, the men rise at once from the bench, and shuffle softly from the room.

The last of them, a man of middle height, who limps on one foot, carefully puts out the fire. This is the owner of the cottage, Skokan.

Outside, his companions waited in the yard. One of them had in his hands four rods, each about three yards long, bent in the form of a bow, and a pole. All wore something fastened at their sides, which looked like a bag. When Skokan had taken from under the eaves a little, roundish bundle of rods, and another long pole, he also fastened a bag at his side. That done, he

whistled to a small dog to come out of his kennel, and then they all left the yard together, Skokan closing the gate carefully, so that the dog should not get out.

Leaving the road at once, they entered under the dark vault of the branches of the great pine-trees. Not a word was spoken amongst them. For half an hour they passed on, following Skokan, sometimes through the thick woods, sometimes through new plantations, where the branches of the young trees beat roughly against their faces. At last they came to a little brook that wound its way through the thickets. There Skokan stopped.

'Mates,' he said in a low voice, 'we will stop here and rest, so that we shall not go heated into the water.'

They all sat down on the spongy moss, unable to see one another in the dark.

'Listen, mates,' went on Skokan, 'I have heard a report. You know, mates, that we have worked together these twelve years, and up to now they have never caught any of us. But yesterday evening I heard something.'

'What then?' asked two voices. The third man was silent.

'You know Frantishka, who was my wife's friend, is in service with the bailiff.'

'Ay, what then?' assented again the two voices.

'Yesterday my wife went with her to vespers, and Frantishka told her that they say we ought to keep an eye on you, Zinka. They say that yesterday morning you were talking for a long time with the bailiff and the forester at the office.'

The man who had hitherto kept silence, answered quickly, 'I went to the office to pay the rent.'

'But Frantishka says that you were there a long time.'

'Skokan, you are not fooled by a woman's chatter,' answered the man who was addressed. 'All these years we have worked together you have never doubted me. The forester was there only by chance.'

'Well, mate, I did think it was just woman's chatter,' agreed Skokan.

'I don't believe it.' 'Nor I,' said the other two.

'I have only told you, mates, that there was something said,' replied Skokan easily. 'Now we are cool let us go down to the mere. We can jump the stream easily just below here.'

The men were poachers, and to-night were going to catch carp in one of the Count's meres. They had been thither often

enough before, they and the other villagers too. For they all poached—in winter game, and in the summer carp; stealing out at night, when the moon rose late, from their quiet cottages in the lonely woods; to return at dawn, soaking wet, and numbed with cold; bent sometimes with the weight of the carp in the bags on their backs, and sometimes with the pain of a gunshot; and sometimes leaving behind them on the forest paths drops of blood to mark their steps. Now and again a man never came home at all.

Many of them had no occasion to poach. They could live well enough on the produce of their fields and meadows. But the poaching was a passion with them. Of them all, the most daring and the most experienced was the limping Skokan. What a number of carp that man had taken home from the Count's fishponds for his children to eat! His wife also secretly took the fish round for sale. The neighbouring country priests bought them for Fridays, the schoolmasters, and sometimes the gentlefolks in the neighbouring towns. By means of this trade with the Count's carp, Skokan and his companions were piling up a nice little heap of florins. The highest ambition of the Count's gamekeepers was to catch Skokan in the act. But all their ingenuity had been hitherto in vain. He always got away.

The poachers rose, and groped through the dark to the edge of the stream. They knew the place well. Three of them had already jumped the brook. Only Zinka remained. Then he jumped too, but, alighting on his right foot, gave a sudden shriek of pain. The same instant he checked himself, and was silent.

'What's happened, Zinka?' asked Skokan quickly.

'I jumped on the stump of a tree, and have hurt my foot.'

In fact, he had jumped barefooted on the stump of a young pine, which had been sawn half through, and broken off. A sharp splinter stood up like a finger, and had pierced the sole of his foot.

'It pains me fearfully,' moaned Zinka.

One of the poachers tore off a strip, about four inches wide, from the edge of his bag, and gave it to Zinka, who bound his wound with it, and, having picked up his rods, limped after his mates.

'My wound will get washed in the water, and after a few days it will be quite well,' he comforted himself, bearing the keen pain with the quiet philosophy of a rough nature, not a little assisted by the fact that he had something heavier than the pain weighing

upon his mind. Already he had set down his wound as a judgment come upon him for the treachery of which he had been guilty against his mates. For he was leading his friends, with whom he had poached ever since he was a lad, and more particularly his old, faithful, true mate Skokan, into a trap which the Count's gamekeepers had set.

Only the day before, the Count's bailiff had sent for him to come to the office, and there had said to him dryly and shortly, 'Zinka, all the world knows that you poach with Skokan. Now, if you will not tell us when and where Skokan goes for the fish, so that we can take him in the act, understand this—the time is coming round for the conscription. Your only son will have to stand, and we will have him enlisted, without any chance of his getting off. You will not see him, Zinka, for fourteen years—perhaps never again.'

The bailiff's threat struck Zinka dumb.

'Now, if you will tell us,' continued the bailiff, 'when and where that old rogue goes poaching, and we catch him, I will get your son off from the conscription for ever.'

Zinka and his wife had no child except Tomash. Dearly they loved him, and often they talked to each other how they would give him a cottage, and marry him, and reckoned up whether they had put by money enough. Already they had their eyes on several peasants' smart young daughters who would do for him. But the conscription! Fourteen years in the army!

Zinka knew very well that he had been for some time in evil odour with the bailiff for his poaching, and that it was out of revenge that the bailiff would get Tomash enlisted. Well, he could save Tomash. But he must betray his old and faithful mate. To steal carp out of the Count's mere—in that Zinka saw no harm at all. But to betray his mate, who helped him to steal the carp, that seemed to Zinka the vilest baseness and degradation.

The conflict in the poacher's soul was fierce. Against his friendship for Skokan, his instincts of a father battled hard, telling him that his first duty was to his own flesh and blood. But for all that he hesitated. The bailiff saw it, and began to describe to him the hardships and miseries of the fourteen years' military service. 'For the smallest neglect,' said the bailiff, 'a soldier has to run the gauntlet, to be wounded with swords in the sides and the back, until his steps are printed in blood!' And of course

the soldier might come home a cripple, with only one foot, or without a hand.

'Your honour,' broke in the voice of poor, terrified Zinka, 'the Lord's will must be done! This is a mean, shameful deed. I know it. But I will do this to save my son. It would be the death of his mother, if they took him away.'

The bailiff smiled quietly, patted the poacher on the shoulder, and said, 'You are a good and worthy tenant of his lordship's to give information against these people who rob him. Now, tell me, when and where will Skokan be going for the fish?'

'Your honour, to-morrow at midnight we are going down to the big mere,' replied the poacher in a trembling voice.

He felt as if, at that moment, his heart was being crushed in a vice.

'Good. The forester will attend to it. If Skokan is caught, they will let you go. And,' he added, 'they will know Skokan by his limp.' Then he changed his threatening tone to a pleasant one, and set the poacher at his ease, saying, 'We will get your son put down on the list as short-sighted, and he will be clear of the conscription for ever.'

Zinka thanked him for his kindness. He had still to explain which way the poachers would approach the mere. After that the bailiff let him go.

On his way home Zinka was very unhappy about having betrayed his mate, but he did his best to comfort himself with the assurance that what he had done was his duty to his son. But not a word did he say about what had passed, neither to his son nor to his wife. And now he was on his way to the mere with his mates, with Skokan, whom a warning against him had reached, but who, nevertheless, believing in his previous fidelity, had given the warning no credence. His other mates trusted him too, Novak and Jarosh. Zinka was sure of it, and it pained him the more that he had betrayed them.

They were making their way now through the thickets downwards from the higher ground. A few hundred steps and they were on the edge of the wood. A narrow ribbon of meadow lay before them, and beyond it, surrounded with rushes and reeds, the black surface of the wide mere; black, because the sky was strewn with thick, dark clouds, through which the rays of the moon, that had just risen, glimmered only now and then for a moment. Two of the poachers undid the bundle of rods which they had brought,

bound them in pairs, in the form of a cross, and fastened upon their ends strong nets which they took out of their bags. The nets thus constructed they fastened to the ends of the two poles. A few words spoken softly, and then they silently took different ways to the different parts of the mere.

The mere, lying in a hollow, was in the form of an acute-angled triangle, whose sharpest angle pointed towards the west. The dam at the other end lay towards the east. The poachers came out of the wood directly against the apex of the triangle. Skokan limped along the northern side, and with him Jarosh with the net. On the southern side were Zinka and Novak. They all looked for the places where the openings in the bushes offered a path into the water.

Three of the poachers had no suspicion at that moment, that in the thick, leafy branches of the alders, that stood dark around the borders of the pool, and in the shadows of the tangled willows, were hidden the Count's gamekeepers and woodmen. Only Zinka knew that, and sorely the upbraidings of his conscience tormented him. For a moment he thought that he might take his mates away from the danger; but then he remembered with a shudder the fourteen years' military service, and the lost arms and legs. When he reached the pond the chill of the water was comforting to his fevered blood. Only fifteen steps from the rushes the water was clear, where the carp come to feed in the night. There the poachers let down their nets, in which, when they were, after a short time, lifted from the water there were always several large fish.

Zinka's hand trembled as he lifted the slippery carp out of the net and put them into his bag. Every instant he expected that the gamekeepers and woodmen hiding themselves amidst the alders would present themselves before his eyes. Novak's face brightened with pleasure at the size of the fish. Skokan and Jarosh were fortunate, too. On both sides of the water the carp were travelling rapidly out of the mere of their lord and master the Count into the bags of the poachers.

In the valley round the mere not a sound of living thing was audible; only the reeds, bent by the wind, rustled together, as did the dark leaves of the alders, and the tangled branches of the willows bending down over the rushes; and, at a little distance, the ceaseless whispering of the pine forest was audible. The darkness was profound. But the quick eyes of the poachers, accustomed to

the gloom, and practised to recognise objects even in the darkness, cautiously stole around, even at the busiest moments of their labour, spying keenly, and seconded by sharp hearing, to observe the approach of any danger. Suddenly the hoot of an owl sounded through the silence of the night. It floated over to Zinka and Novak from the north. Both of them instantly, as if they had been struck by a shot from an invisible weapon, dropped their fish, stooped down to their necks in the water, and hid themselves against the high reeds. A short time, and again the hoot was repeated. Novak, crouched against the reeds, softly and silently drew the net to himself, cut off the net from the rods with a knife, and twisted it around his neck. Then he softly let the rods and the pole go in the water. He knew that the hoot of the owl had really come from Skokan, who, in a dim shimmer of the moon's rays peeping for a moment through the torn clouds, had seen with his quick eye a gun-barrel glisten amongst the branches of the alders. In an instant he had guessed that the mere was surrounded, and had given the owl's hoot as a warning sign to his companions to take flight.

Crouched against the high reeds, the poachers could not now see what was being done around the mere. They could not see the gamekeepers creeping out of the thick bushes on both sides, near the apex of the mere, nor how they came along the banks in order to cut off the retreat to the woods.

The forester and the gamekeepers, in the hands of one of whom the long gun had glistened, waited, listening breathlessly to hear the water splash somewhere in the pool. They had recognised the owl's hoot as an imitation, and knew that that is a sign for flight among the poachers, whom they had seen arrive and wade into the pool. The one of them who recognised the limping Skokan had permission from the forester to shoot at him. At the others they were not to shoot under any circumstances.

The poachers, guessing that the gamekeepers would wait for them near the upper part of the pool, crouching down to their necks in the water, waded cautiously along by the reeds in an eastward direction, downwards towards the dam, in hope of getting out of the mere, and taking flight to the wood.

Saving their bags filled with carp was not to be thought of. They let them go in the water, and the carp struggled and wriggled in the bags until they succeeded at last in getting out the same way they went in.

Softly and cautiously the poachers crept along through the water, so as not to disturb it, lest they should be betrayed by the splashing. Skokan and Jarosh, having waded first of all about a thousand steps by the side of the rushes, crept out afterwards into the deep. There, hidden by the darkness, and by the mist which rose from the mere, they swam silently straight forward in the dark, where it was impossible for any human eye to descry them from the bank, downwards towards the dam. When they reached it they crept in amongst the alders, pushed their way through them to the top of the dam, crossed it on all fours, and slipped down behind into the thicket, where they were safe. They were not together. Neither knew anything of the other. Skokan, with his lame leg, had dropped behind in swimming. At that moment the wind for an instant cleared the clouds from the sky around the moon, and the moon, a few days past the full, shone out clearly over the mere and the wide woods.

On the southern side of the mere, about half way to the dam, Novak crept out of the rushes, leapt up on the bank, and like a frightened stag shot with monster strides across the meadow into the wood and disappeared. The gamekeepers saw him plainly, but it was impossible to catch him.

Zinka, too, had crept far from the place where they had caught the carp, and waited for the clouds to cover the moon to take a similar flight to the woods. He was greatly distressed, both with anxiety about his companions, and with the pain that his wound gave him. The bandage had slipped off it, and the sand and the mud had got in. His foot had swollen considerably, and pained him so cruelly that more than once he was near swooning. He wetted his face with the cold water to keep away the sensation of faintness. Meanwhile he awaited momentarily, with a feverish terror, the report of a gun, which would bring down one of his mates either to the earth or to the depths of the mere. Crouched up to his neck in the water against the lofty reeds, he folded his hands, swollen with the cold water, and looking up into the sky, in which the black clouds hurried in dark flight from west to east, prayed with a wild fervour.

‘O God, give my mates a chance of getting away safely!’

Once more the heavy clouds veiled the scene in impenetrable darkness. Zinka raised himself. But scarcely had he got upon his feet, when he became aware of a burning pain which seemed to mount from his wound to his head. It was impossible to tread

upon that foot. But fly he must! The gamekeepers would let him go if he cried out, but that he dared not do, lest his mates should know that he had betrayed them.

Anxious to avail himself of the momentary gloom, he waded cautiously out of the water and the thick, sticky mud, and, parting with his hands the rustling reeds, emerged at length on the high bank, and, limping, made his way, with long springs, towards the wood.

Suddenly again the clouds broke. The moon shone out in all her brightness, lighting the mysterious dim woods, and gleaming in silver threads upon the mere, rippling beneath the wind. The sudden brightness filled the flying poacher with alarm. With a great effort he hastened with all his strength his halting steps. At that moment a red light gleamed in his eyes. In the quiet of the night the report of a gun rang out startlingly, and rolled on, repeated by the echoes of the woods, till it finally died away. The moment after the shot, Zinka stumbled as if he had been struck by lightning. In the light of the moon, his form stood out black against the grey meadow, close by a thicket. Several times he mastered himself by an effort, but at last rolled over, as a stifled groan broke from his lips pressed against the damp moss. Then everything was quiet and the dark body lay still.

Near the place from whence the shot was fired, a short whistle sounded, and was answered from the other side of the mere. It was the sign of the gamekeepers that their hunt was ended.

At the head of the mere the gamekeepers and woodmen gathered in a knot round one who whispered:

‘That limping beast will give us no more trouble.’

‘Skokan?’ asked one.

‘He rolled over; didn’t you see?’

‘At last!’ said another.

None of them went near the wounded man, lest he should recognise them, and give evidence against them, or, more likely, try to revenge himself. Leaving the mere, they took their way home through the dark woods.

The report of the gun made the three poachers hidden in the thickets start. All of them knew that one of their companions had been shot at. Skokan and Jarosh, hidden under the dam, knew that the shot must have been fired at Zinka or Novak. Novak, being nearer, was sure that it was fired at Zinka.

Nearly an hour passed. Novak listened anxiously to assure

himself that the gamekeepers were really gone, and, hearing nothing more of them, ventured at last out of the thicket. He was soaked to the skin, and shivering with fear and cold. Cautiously he looked around the meadow, and suddenly stopped, rooted to the ground with horror. About forty steps off, a man with uncovered head sat in the moonlight near a thicket. He was pressing both hands to his face, and moaning as he rocked himself from right to left, 'O my God, my God!' Then he fell flat on his back, and his hands dropped powerless at his sides.

The moonlight shone out more clearly, and Novak recognised Zinka. A few steps, without considering whether he was in danger or not, and he knelt on the grass by his side. In a stifled voice, Zinka was whispering to himself, 'Jesus, Maria, Joseph!' that cry of the peasant in his moments of agony.

Suddenly Novak remembered his wonted caution of a poacher. Quickly passing his left arm beneath Zinka's knees, and his right around his shoulders, he lifted him and ran with him to the woods. There he laid him down again upon the moss and asked him,

'Where are you wounded?'

'On the right side, in the ribs,' whispered Zinka, and added, 'Nothing has happened to the rest of you, please God!'

After a time he whispered, pressing his hand to his breast, 'I shan't live; they have settled me.'

Novak put his thick, swollen hands to his lips and imitated the cry of an owl, 'Tu-whoo, tu-whoo!'

Bending down again over the wounded man, he took out of his pocket a well-corked bottle, opened it, and said:

'Taste a little powder, mate. It will drive out the sting.'

Zinka took the bottle in his weak left hand, lifted it to his mouth, and poured on his tongue a few grains of gunpowder, rolled them in his mouth for a few moments, and swallowed them. That is with the Bohemian poachers a favourite preventative against the evil consequences of a wound.

'It is no good,' whispered Zinka. With a sad smile he went on, 'The shot has gone into my lungs.' And, as he spoke, he coughed, and the blood ran out of his mouth.

Again Novak imitated the hoot of an owl, and this time the cry was answered from a short distance. The boughs of the pines rustled, and presently Skokan appeared, pushing his way through the underwood.

'Zinka has received the whole charge in his lungs,' Novak

whispered into Skokan's ear. 'It seems to me they have finished him.'

Skokan bent over Zinka, saying, 'It's I, mate, Skokan.'

Zinka, feeling with his left hand in the dark, touched Skokan's face. It was the touch of a hand of ice, and he spoke disjointedly.

'Mate—you're alive—please God—forgive—for Tommy's sake only child—fourteen years—the gauntlet——'

He could say no more. There was a dull, rattling sound in his throat. Skokan could find no meaning in his words. Leaning towards Novak, he whispered, 'He does not know what he is saying; he is delirious. Spread out the nets and we will take him home.'

They spread out the nets, taking them from their necks and laying them out one above the other on the grass. Opening them to half their breadth, they laid the helpless Zinka in them, lifted up the ends of the nets, and proceeded into the depth of the wood. There they found a narrow path which wound like a snake. Many a time had they taken their way along it, bending under the weight of the fish they had stolen. Five times they had led or carried home a wounded comrade.

Zinka half lay and half sat in the net. Now and then he sighed, and the rattling sound was audible in his throat. They proceeded thus for half an hour through the thickest part of the wood, where the rays of the moon were unable to pierce the branches, though she shone now brightly. Presently, again, Zinka began to murmur some unintelligible words.

'Keep quiet, mate,' said Skokan. 'You'll be all right presently.'

It seemed that Zinka heard, for he remained still. The poachers hastened as much as they could. At last a light appeared before them, and after a little while they were on the edge of the wood. The moon shone down clearly with her soft light, the wind had dropped, and the sky was cloudless.

Where the path joined the road they laid down their burden on the soft, fresh grass, moistened with dew. The moonlight fell straight on Zinka's face. It was as white as linen. A face carved in ivory might have looked so. With a sudden start Skokan put his hand to the pale cheek. It was cold as ice, stiff and stark. In the glassy eye, that seemed to start from its socket, the dim moonlight reflected itself glitteringly.

'Jesus, Maria! it's all up with him,' exclaimed Skokan.

Starting up, Novák caught his hair with both his hands, as if he would with a single wrench tear it from his skull.

'The woman and the lad will go mad,' said Novák. He was silent for a moment, and then asked, more as if speaking to himself than to his mate, 'But how did the gamekeepers guess that we were going to-night——' He stopped, and continued, in a cautious voice, almost as if he feared lest the dead man should hear his words: 'Skokan, what Frantishka said was true, then.'

'I thought of that, mate, too, but—God knows,' said Skokan, as if loth to judge the dead man.

'You are the stronger,' said Skokan. 'Carry him home. 'Tis not far. I will go in front and tell his wife that there has been an accident.'

He rose from the ground as he spoke and limped away.

Novák drew together the four corners of the net with both his hands, knelt down by the corpse, and then, turning away from it, drew it up upon his back, rose, balanced himself, and proceeded with his burden along the lane. On his right the head and one hand of the dead man hung out of the net. On the other side jogged a wet, naked foot. And at the same time, in the dim depths of the wood, sounded the melodious song of the thrush welcoming the approaching dawn.

He was soon in sight of the cottages. Already a fire had been lighted in one of them. Towards that he directed his steps. Some dogs, barking wildly, ran out to meet him, then, recognising him, were silent, and sniffed at his burden. From the cottage Skokan came out to meet him, and they both of them took the dead man in their arms.

'They think he is only wounded,' whispered Skokan hurriedly.

A woman half-dressed, barefooted, and with her hair in wild disorder, followed almost at Skokan's heels. It was Zinka's wife. She had her son with her, and from the lips of both of them broke the wild, heart-piercing peasant cry, 'Jesus, Maria, Joseph!'

The wailing son helped the poachers to carry his father.

'I always told him it would end like this one day,' said the woman. And calling him 'Joseph, Joseph!' she put down her hand to his face.

In an instant she drew it back.

'The five wounds of the Lord Christ! he is as cold as ice!'

The poachers carried their mate into the little room, where the

flickering, restless flame of the resinous pine danced on the hearth. They laid him on a bed. A single look at the glassy eyes, in which now the red flame of the pine wood pictured itself, sparkling and glistening, as the moonlight had done in the road, and woman and boy, as if a flash of lightning had struck them to the earth, fell on their knees beside the bed, in wild, harsh tones, shrieking, rather than crying, 'Jesus, Maria! Jesus, Maria!' Then a wailing without words, broken and piercing, filled the little chamber.

The two poachers stood by the hearth looking now at their dead companion, now at the weeping wife, now at the sobbing son. The same gloomy thought haunted them both. Perhaps some dark night their end would be the same. The minutes passed. The grey light crept into the room. Skokan turned his face towards the hearth, and looked thoughtfully at the sinking flames. Then he put on another pine log. The fire took fresh life, and burned up again. Again the dogs barked. Slow steps came across the yard, and Jarosh walked into the room. Unable to find his mates, he had returned home, and seeing the light had come to Zinka's cottage.

The woman and the youth did not notice him. With a few signs and half a dozen words his mates enlightened him as to what had happened. Then for a while they took counsel softly. After that Novak and Jarosh went away.

Skokan sat down on the bench by the hearth. The pine-log flames, flickering restlessly, flared up and fell, and in their shifting light it seemed to Skokan that the face of the dead man smiled coldly, and then again was contorted with pain.

In half an hour Jarosh returned, having changed his clothes. He sat down in Skokan's place by the hearth. Skokan limped home. The eastern sky was coloured with the red light of the dawn. Jarosh, sitting down at the hearth, took a coal with which he lighted the tobacco in his short, wooden pipe, and smoked, gazing pensively at the blue clouds which he blew from his lips.

The wife and boy had wept all the tears out of their weary eyes, but they were still crouched by the bed, sobbing plaintively. Little suspicion had the son that he was the occasion of his father's death! In an hour or so it was known in all the cottages that Zinka was dead, shot it was whispered. And the women said, 'That's how my man will end one of these days. I'm always telling him so.'

The bailiff was in his office, engaged in looking over his accounts when the forester came in with the news.

‘Well, we’ve got rid, at last, of that limping, poaching beast, Skokan. One of the gamekeepers finished him off with a shot.’

‘Then Zinka did not deceive us,’ said the bailiff, coolly. ‘We will save his son from being enlisted.’

The subject was soon dropped, and they talked of something else. Presently some one came in at the door, and they turned to see who it was. Pale as ghosts, the bailiff and the forester stood staring as if they had been turned into stone. On the other side of the table at which the rents were paid, putting down his silver florins, stood—Skokan.

The cunning old fox, in order to give an impression that he had no knowledge at all of what had taken place the previous night, had limped up coolly and humbly to pay his rent. His experienced eye saw that there was something amiss, but he had no suspicion of the truth. For a moment the bailiff and the forester believed they saw a ghost.

‘I humbly kiss your honour’s hand,’ he said, bending his back in an awkward bow. ‘I came to pay the rent and the tax,’ and, turning his rough hat in his hands, he looked down at the floor.

The bailiff wrote the receipt in his book, and Skokan carefully placing it in the pocket of his shabby, knitted jersey, once more bowed, and repeating, ‘I kiss your honour’s hands,’ left the office.

The bailiff turned to the forester.

‘The cursed thief!’ said the latter, ‘I myself saw him fall, when the man shot at him. He must have thrown himself down on purpose to make us think that we had hit him. We’ll have him some day.’

Later in the day the country doctor came in. He had been sent for, he said, to see the dead body of Joseph Zinka, a peasant, who had died of a gunshot the previous night. He had his foot wounded, too, apparently from having trodden on something sharp. The bailiff and the forester exchanged a glance.

‘He is no great loss,’ said the forester, when the doctor was gone. ‘A thief and a poacher.’

As the doctor had been called in, a sort of inquest was set on foot. The bailiff was foremost in it, and that very day went down to question Zinka’s wife, but could ascertain nothing, except that Zinka had come home in the night, from somewhere, wounded, and had soon afterwards died. And that was all that ever came out.

On the fourth day the man was buried, and the reports of the investigations lie somewhere covered with dust and mould.

Zinka, however, had saved his son. The lad was now his mother's only support, and so exempt. He kept away from poaching, too, warned by his father's death.

Skokan, Novak, and Jarosh, shocked by the fate of their mate, abstained for a few weeks from the Count's fish-ponds. But the impression of the grisly adventure gradually became weaker, and after a time their old passion for poaching gained the victory, and they went back to the mere just as if nothing had happened.

Two years afterwards, Skokan disappeared. In the autumn, a fleshless skeleton was found at the bottom of one of the big meres, and it was generally supposed to be the remains of the limping poacher.

Novak and Jarosh knew that it was so. They had seen the shot fired at Skokan standing up to his armpits in the water. The two surviving poachers, when they were old, were rheumatic, the consequence of the frequent wading at night in the icy meres, and the wandering home in wet clothes through the freezing morning mists to their distant homes. Bent double, and scarcely able to move their joints, the old sinners, unable any longer to poach on a large scale, would betake themselves to the neighbouring streams, and catch small fish with a rod, and meanwhile narrate to each other the great catches of the days of their youth. Sitting on the bank under the shadow of the willows, watching with their dim eyes the float dancing in the water, they talked of their former mates who were now gone 'there.' They reminded each other of how they had come to go 'there,' and if ever Zinka and his fate came into their memories, they shook their heads remarking that 'there was some hitch in it that time.'

THINGS NOT GENERALLY KNOWN.

A GREAT ARTIST is said to have observed at the close of his life, 'I am still learning.' A schoolmaster might with justice make the same remark. One of the supposed benefits of his profession is that his spirit is kept fresh by constant contact with younger minds—it is well to make much of the minds, for bodies (at least for purposes of corporal punishment) have passed away. Children are often called angels, schoolboys might with more literal accuracy be spoken of as Cherubim; but this is a digression. Not only, I would say, is the spirit of the teacher, as Sunday-school children always call their instructor, kept fresh, but his mind is being constantly enriched by information gained from youthful lips. Of a truth, 'while we teach'—as the Latin exercise says simply—'we are taught.' The only trouble is that we have many masters. 'Quot præceptores, tot sententiæ.' Each of these mannikin masters has his own view, his own doctrine. We are not so fortunate as Lord Sherbrooke, who in earlier days promised to educate his masters. No, by the way, he only said 'we must,' and that we say too, but we cannot do it. We masters have many masters, and we find—especially in examination times—that truth is simple, but error manifold, so manifold that after looking over (we should prefer overlooking) many answers we begin to doubt our previous knowledge, as we fondly deemed it. What has hitherto acted as a brain is in a whirl, we doubt our own identity; we begin to think it possible that 'amor' may after all be feminine, and 'ipse' a demonstrative pronoun. We are not disposed to jest more than Pilate was, but we ask, with glassy eye and faltering tongue, 'What is truth?' Jesting we leave to our pupils. They think it bad to be examined. I—for even masters were once boys—used to think there could be nothing worse. To be examined might be the sorriest sport on earth, had not the verb an active as well as a passive voice (we pedantic pedagogues must talk 'shop'). To examine is penal servitude. Penal servitude has its uses. A toad may conceal a jewel. It is purposed to set down without malice some of the pieces of information gained in the course of a year's tuition, in the hope that they may prove to be 'things not generally known.' We teachers must be

teaching, and when, by way of *vice versâ*, we are taught by those we try to teach we yearn to pass on the information thus gained, and to teach the whole world through the pages of a magazine. We may have our failings, but none shall justly accuse us of selfishness. Our pie may have much crust. That we will digest as best we may. The plums in the pie may be few, but, such as they are, we will pull them out and bid our neighbours share them without a tinge of the Pharisaic self-complacency which mars the moral beauty of John Horner.

In the Jubilee year—*hinc omne principium*—it seemed natural to say something about Queen Victoria. In reply to the question, 'Who was her husband?' came various answers. George the Second, William the Fourth, the Duke of Kent, the Duke of Wellington, the Prince of Wales, were among those selected for the position. History may well get a little 'mixed' in course of time, seeing that there is no absolute consensus of opinion about facts of comparatively recent date.

If knowledge of modern English history is defective, Bible history fares no better. Some of us have heard the word Teraphim, but we did not know that 'he was the father-in-law of Samson, and he took Samson's daughter and gave her to some other man, and Samson burns his house and him.' We live and learn. Let us observe, in passing, the 'historic present' 'burns,' because of it another boy observed that 'it is used geographically of past events.' Farrar's priceless card of Greek Syntax says 'graphically,' but, as that word conveyed little meaning to the mind in question, he wisely substituted a word that meant something to him, though in the particular context it might, like Captain Bunsby's oracular utterances, lack lucidity.

There is a pleasing mixture of fact and fiction in the account of Joshua. 'He was,' says one authority, 'the son of Nun; he was sometimes called Jesus; he rested three nights in the bosom of a whale, and the Book of Joshua is sometimes called the Book of Jasher. The spirit of the Lord was upon Joshua, and he died of an old age.' This boy likes to tell all he knows; he is great at alternative titles; he seems to mistake Joshua for another person whose name begins with the same two letters, and contains also *a* and *h*, but such trifling inaccuracy is more than atoned for by the poetical refinement which describes Jonah as 'resting in the bosom of a whale.' It is indeed a lovely picture, which criticism would only injure. In spirit the hero might be divine, but his

body was human ; old age came on him as a disease. In sharp contrast to this prolixity comes the account of David as given by another pupil. Being asked to give a short account of the life of David, he confined himself to a biography of a brevity truly Laconian : ' cild Glia ' was the beginning and end of his answer. Not only are the words few, but they are abbreviated till they become almost unintelligible. It is believed that in these two words he meant to give the sum and substance of David's struggle with the giant. A more diffuse writer would have said, ' he killed Goliath.' Probably it was on this one episode that this young spirit loved to dwell, while his poetic eye, like that of one of Helen's babies, saw the sword all ' bluggy.' In these days, when so many people write three volumes of biography or autobiography that few are left to read them, and of those few yet fewer have the requisite leisure for the task or treat, what a lesson might be learned from this young Spartan, who sums up a life in two words, and puts those words in a most abbreviated form ? We feel as we read that the limit of terseness has been reached ; the absence of one more letter would have made the story unintelligible.

Though some boys show a certain familiarity with stories from the Bible, one boy at least had an original view as to the authorship of that book ; he simply says, ' Milton wrote the Bible.' It seems a little strange, but when a man is found to assert that Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays it is not matter for much marvel that a boy should exist who states that Milton wrote the Bible ; anybody might write anything. Some are weak in chronology. A youth who was told that Olympus was mentioned by Homer straightway proceeded to place it—I beg pardon, to locate it—in America. This may have been meant as a compliment, implying the antiquity of that country ; but, however that may be, there can be no doubt of the genuine enthusiasm in the outburst, ' America is a glorious life ! ' It is somewhat vague in expression, as enthusiasm is apt to be, recalling, in fact, a remark of a taciturn landlady, who usually confined her conversation to comments on the condition of the weather—' it is wet,' ' it is cold ; ' but one day she was roused by rapid alternations of atmospheric states to say, ' 'Tis a changeable climate, this England.' If England may be a changeable climate, America may be a glorious life. This latter statement is the more complimentary because it does not accurately represent the Latin whereof it purports to

be a translation. The Roman simply says, 'Amicitia est gloria vitæ.'

A slight similarity suffices to lure the luckless pupil from the proper path. For instance, to the question, 'who was Plato?' comes the ready reply, 'the Devil.' Nor should this statement startle when we reflect that Pluto differs from Plato only by a letter—a distinction, in fact, without a difference—and if Pluto was not exactly the Devil he had something to do with the realms below. I have long thought it wrong to have names so much alike as Plato, Pluto, Plutus. To give such names is to lead boys into temptation, yea, and to set traps in their way. While we are, so to say, in the lower regions, I may observe that one boy gave an additional horror to a horrible stream by calling it 'the river Stynx.'

Roaming, as it were, through the regions of the dead, I am reminded of a pupil who stated in writing that 'a dead language is one which is spoken after death: the Greek language is spoken below, the Latin above; *therefore*' (thus does he combine classical knowledge with mathematical forms) 'Latin is harder than Greek.' If one may try to explain the meaning of this mystic utterance, it would seem to imply that the better boys would be 'above,' and would naturally be engaged in learning the more learned language. Greek would be left to the laggards.

'I am not he,' proudly writes another, 'who moved the dead out of danger.' To do so, indeed, would seem to be somewhat of a work of supererogation. Proud in his philosophy, he is inaccurate in his scholarship. The Latin words are 'Non is sum qui mortis periculo movear.'

Let us try to leave Avernus and seek the upper air. Not only did Milton write the Bible, but Homer, according to one authority, was the author of 'Lamb's Tales.' Another person attributes them to the pen of Shakespeare, and introduces a gastronomic element by writing 'Lamb's Tails.' Of a like carnal mind was one who thought the 'essence' in 'so uncompounded was their essence pure' to refer to 'gravy.' The misplacement of a comma will convert an exhortation to equity into an incitement to intemperance. 'Drink fair, Betsy, whatever you do,' appeared in an article by Dr. Jessopp as 'Drink, fair Betsy, whatever you do.' The immorality of the advice is aggravated by the compliment to her personal appearance. If eloquent bishops suffer wrong at the hands of enterprising editors, country parsons have other trials.

than those whereof they write—trials fashioned by the fingers of humorous compositors.

Mention has been made of gastronomic thoughts and misrepresentation of episcopal doctrine; these errors or peculiarities were combined in the mind of the candidate for Confirmation who, after careful preparation, gave it as his opinion that his 'Christian privileges' were 'drunkenness and gluttony.'

The boy must have been hungry who promised the following reward to diligence:—'Zealous youths are to be nourished' (boys always love that word, as they love 'exhort' and 'endeavour') 'on dogs and horses.' This is scarcely a seductive pabulum, but there is no intention of irony, so far as one may venture to fathom the depths of the youthful mind; it is only a rather careless 'rendering,' as the newspapers call it, of the sentence '*Studiosi solent esse juvenes canum equorumque alendorum.*' He might with profit in riper years join that Society whose initials are S.P.C.K., an official of which was so eloquent about the attractiveness of certain cates that he had recently enjoyed that a bishop who listened suggested that for the future the initials should represent the 'Society for Promoting Culinary Knowledge.'

The scholar who translated 'mel' by 'meal' was led away by a similarity of sound which proves a pitfall to many feet. I might say 'a great many,' which one boy gave as the English of '*magnæ manus.*' According to this method of translation, '*mundus*' means the 'moon.' Some translators seem to be in such peril of perishing in the abysses of a sentence that they snatch at any straw which may preserve them awhile. One Latin word may be something like one English word, and on this slight basis—perhaps nothing more than the similarity of a single syllable—they set themselves, if we may change the metaphor, to rear a lofty structure; for instance, '*admodum fuit militum virtus laudanda*' appears as 'the soldiers advanced praising;' the 'ad' of '*admodum*' suggested 'advanced,' and before that advance all classical obstacles had to yield. A translator of this type, it need hardly be said, writes 'the less they do' for '*eo minus dant.*'

'*Adsum qui feci*' seems simple, and is fairly familiar to some of us, but there are people who will make difficulties; one says 'he makes him absent;' another, 'I am present which is made.' The latter is a hard saying, and worthy of Mrs. Gamp.

Sometimes the diversity of error is so great that the brain can work no longer, but simply whirls about. '*Stultus qui credam*'

appears in many forms: 'He speaks the truth,' 'Who will be foolish?' 'I was thinking that you are foolish,' 'What a foolish boy!' 'Who will believe a fool?' The last word raises a question which often perplexes the mind of the examiner, namely, how much of this is folly, and how much sheer knavery? Experience goes to prove that most blunderers are mere fools with just a dash of knavery to give their rubbish a relish.

The boy who says that 'mihi exorandus est' means 'I am adorned' ignores one word, and seizes one syllable of another as the clue to the English. Before all power of thought or writing is robbed by the recollection of this rubbish, one may give three versions of a not very difficult sentence: 'Adeo erat sapiens ut omnes eum admirarentur.' 'Adeo was wise, but all admired him;' here 'b' is inserted before 'ut,' merely, it would seem, for the sake of a sneer at wisdom. 'To go was wise;' this translation tends to recall 'Tilbury Nogo,' whose adventures some of us have read. 'The wise was to be present that all admired him;' there is a charming audacity in translating 'adeo' by 'to be present.' Πάντολμος ἀμαθία.

Ignorance is, indeed, all-daring; it represents miracles as taking place where really simple facts are stated. 'Vomere duros exercens colles' are words which imply effort, no doubt; a plough-share does not work easily upon a hill, especially if the hills be rough; but what is this task in comparison with mowing hills with that implement? And yet a boy still lives who said, 'with plough they mow the hard hills.' While one thus ignores agricultural use, another sets at naught the laws of nature, while he feigns mathematical accuracy by the use of Euclidian language. 'All the citizens brought forth laws equal to each other.' The only ground for this startling statement is the sober sentence, 'Omnes cives legibus parere æquum est;' the word 'æquum' recalls to mind a hapless attempt at etymology. The word 'iniquis' occurring, the master was anxious to know its opposite: to his surprise the word 'nego' was suggested; this seemed hopeless! But a moment's meditation showed him that 'iniquis' was confused with 'inquam,' and 'inquam' confounded with 'aio,' whose opposite is 'nego;' and there you are! What can be simpler? If boys spent half the ingenuity on going right which they now devote to going wrong, what progress would be made! But perhaps the teacher's life would not be happy; it might be what a worthy woman called 'montpolous.'

There was some cause for comment when a scholar pictured all the citizens as bringing forth laws, but this is surpassed in strangeness by the announcement, 'When the man gave birth to a son.' This was the supposed equivalent in English for *ἀνδρὸς γενομένου τοῦ παιδός*.

After such physiological portents mere physical peculiarities seem small; but still the man must have presented a somewhat strange appearance who 'bristled himself to approach;' it suggests the fretfulness of the 'porpentine'—a real human 'porpentine,' as Mr. Chadband might say—but, after all, we need not spend time in trying to form mental pictures of something which is not known to have occurred. Virgil merely says, 'ipsum horrebat adire,' which words admit of a simpler translation. So, again, one boy said that 'a foot prepares to go hand in hand.' This statement is rather 'mixed;' the outline of the picture is blurred; one is disposed to wonder how the foot looked in that position—but, in reality, no human foot ever made such preparations: what steps could it take? In the original the language and statement are equally simple—'pedes apparat ire cominus.'

One boy, from personal predilection, felt sympathy for Cyrus, who entered the battle with 'his head bare.' In his excitement he transposed a little, and represented the hero as going to the fight 'with his hair bed'—that would be a luxury indeed! This specimen of transposition reminds me of a girl who thrice tried to say 'eggs and bacon;' she began with 'begs,' continued with 'aches,' and ended with 'bakes.' After the third failure she retired from a contest to which she was unequal.

We have all heard of the warriors who showed their indifference to the foe by combing their hair. One boy preferred to speak of 'combining.' Did he think this a smart word for 'plaiting,' or was he simply careless? It seems to be thought now that no boys are careless or idle—all error has a physical origin; the dear things need a doctor, not a stick. But this is a digression.

While we are, like the hatter's friend, 'getting personal,' we may observe that one person was said to be 'recognised by a scar on the face;' this seemed strange, considering the context. On turning to the text, the words so translated were found to be 'in deformitate oræ visus est.'

Practical jokes were not unknown among the stern and simple Romans, if it is true that 'Claudius was painted red by Pætus.' Oxonians of a certain date, as they read these words, may recall the

aspect of a certain statue, whereof a certain portion was painted red—very red indeed—on a certain Saturday night by a Pætus of those days. The artful wag chose that day, one may presume, to ensure the decoration being on view for one whole day. The College was always popular, but never, I fancy, did so many visitors haunt its Quad as on that brilliant Sunday. The Latin words are, ‘Claudius Pæto minatus est.’ Some scholiasts suppose that the young scholar had some notion of ‘minium,’ meaning ‘red lead,’ and, connecting the verb with it, fell into slight error. This artistic reminiscence reminds me of a list of artists which was given by a small boy. Raphael (which chanced to be the boy’s name), Lancier, Shelly, Opie, Reynolds, Dilletante, Etty, Wilkie. Since D. F. Niente appeared as a writer in the *Oxford Spectator*, no such good title has been given to a man as Dilletante.

Art suggests poetry. He must have the soul of a true poet who gave it as his opinion that Locative was another name for Vocative. There can be as little real difference between them as between Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

Of art, oratory is a branch. ‘He took care that Cicero should make a wise speech’ is an excellent idea, but it does not faithfully represent ‘curavit ut oratio Ciceronem saperet.’ ‘Saperet’ would seem to be regarded as a portmanteau word, combining the functions of ‘sapiens’ and ‘faceret.’ A little knowledge may be dangerous: ‘fickle pensioners’ was said to mean ‘fickle hangers-on,’ from ‘pendeo,’ to hang; it is true that pensioners have a happy knack of hanging on to life. A little knowledge sometimes leads to false analogy: ‘amo’ means ‘I love,’ and ‘amant’ means ‘they love;’ ‘ambo’ means ‘both,’ but ‘they both’ is not accurately represented by ‘ambant.’

Of art, sculpture is another branch. One young devotee saw an allusion to this special branch of art where none was contemplated in the original: ‘urbem quam statuo vestra est’ is one of those sentences which haunt examination papers; it is meant for a mild puzzle—no, as a test of that mysterious creature, scholarship—but boys treat it as a puzzle, regarding it as a Christmas game, about as interesting as a dissected map or cognate tenses. Some ignore such a sentence; some see no difficulty in it, having, as one headmaster said, no *αἰσθησις*; some, again, indulge in flights of fancy, and, like other soarers, fall to earth—or, in vulgar language, come a cropper. Translations vary; ‘the city which is yours by statute’ acts as a key to another version, ‘the city

which is yours by right.' In 'the city which was clothed with statues' we see traces of a slight misapprehension of 'vestra'; the translator connected it with 'vestis.' These are all commonplace and common-sense when compared with 'the city was built by a statue'; this statement is in accordance neither with the laws of Latinity nor the experience of daily life; we all know that Balbus built a wall, but none ever heard of a statue building a city—probably the translator has long ceased to expect sense in dead languages. 'Hoot! the jabberin' bodies,' he might exclaim with the critic of French orisons, 'wha can understan' them?'

Hand in hand with 'urbem,' &c., might walk 'Decemviri legibus scribundis.' The examiner who sets such a phrase craves, and will find, some ore among the dross, some oasis in the dreary desert: 'it is written in the idylls of December' is the translation of a poet rather than of a scholar; 'idylls' may be an etherealised recollection of 'ides'—probably the writer's righteous soul had been vexed by Roman dates; 'decem' suggested December, and months were in Latin associated only with troubles about kalends, ides, and other pedantic pedagogic follies. As one boy seizes on the 'decem,' another amplifies one syllable of 'scribundis,' which word apparently he translates twice, 'abounding in the written laws of men;'; 'decem' he utterly ignores; perhaps for him 'decem,' as suggesting December, had painful associations, as it had for one who gave the following English for 'tristis hiems squalentia protulit ora:': 'when winter made dirty faces.' Does he mean that people slip in winter and thus disfigure their faces? or that, water being at that season unattractive, faces continue unclean? or that keen air causes travellers to distort their features; *i.e.*, does he use 'dirty' in the puerile sense of that which is generally objectionable rather than specifically unclean, or, which is most probable, does he really mean nothing at all?

If a boy thought much of meaning, or expected a Latin sentence to make sense, he would scarcely translate 'in Britanniam omnibus navibus meridiano fere tempore accessum est' by 'he was getting to Britain in time to bear all the ships remaining.' The clue to this labyrinth is to be found in a slight confusion between 'fere' and 'ferre,' and in the transposition of the first three letters of 'meridiano'; 'rem' is as good as 'mer,' and 'remaining' contains about the same number of syllables as 'meridiano'—at any rate, it is near enough.

While, so to say, 'our bark is on the sea' (by the way, one

boy thought that 'the fatal and perfidious bark' referred to the noise made by dogs), we may refer to another marine marvel—'inque patens æquor frustra pugnante magistro,' &c., 'the ship was carried by the fighting master into the plain.' Boys often have stories of real or reported feats of strength performed by certain masters, and love to speculate on the result of an encounter between Titanic teachers; this ship-porter would be a formidable antagonist, but would probably be no match for him who aimed at bearing 'all the remaining ships;' still we may observe that the less wondrous feat was actually (*ex hypothesi*) performed, whereas the greater marvel was only a glorious possibility—a noble aim. A third scholar tells us how a navigator meant 'to sail round Cape Horn'—the Greek is ἐπὶ κέρας πλεῖν; it is true that κέρας means a horn, but the addition of Cape cannot claim to be more than an ingenious conjecture. Before leaving the sea let us sound its very depths: 'boils from its bottommost bottom' is a vigorous if somewhat inelegant translation of 'fundoque exæstuat imo.'

From Britain to Anglia seems a natural transition; Anglomania is a word that I have ventured to use for a disease which causes boys to translate Latin words by the English word that is most like it in form or sound; for instance, 'ut Cæsar postea ex captivis comperit' appears as 'that Cæsar should send out the captives from their post; 'quum convenissent,' 'when it was convenient;' 'ventosa in lingua,' 'in a lingering wind.' In sharp contrast to this balmy breeze comes the storm-cloud of the following sentence: 'All the Rumpians died: a whirlwind seized the camp;' Virgil simply says, 'omnes rumpe moras, turbataque corripe castra.' The translator is careful to explain in a note that 'whirlwind' is an allegory; this marks the working of a mature mind; indeed, he was of riper years and was somewhat euphemistically described by his friends as being 'rather weak in his Latin;' if a critic were to remark that he never heard of Rumpians, the obvious explanation is that 'they all died,'—'moras' and 'mors' are pretty much alike. We remember that 'zealous youths are to be fed on dogs and horses;' still, horses are not merely passive, they have their tasks. 'Luduntque jubæ per colla' are words that paint a pretty picture, but where the poet sees pleasure the scholar sees only pain and puzzle,—'he (the horse) puts his mane on his collar;' 'colla' and collar are all but identical. If the human foot must go hand in hand, to the

equine hoof no easy task is set. A man is represented as 'keeping sheep in his eyes:' the authority is *ποιμαίνων ἐπ' ὄσσει*. Is this a vigorous way of expressing the supposed habit of 'making sheeps' eyes,' or is the motive gastronomic, as in the *gourmand* who stated his intention of 'keeping a sheep because he liked kidneys for breakfast?' Poor sheep! none but Prometheus could adequately realise its sufferings.

While dealing with details of personal appearance, one may, in turn, mention 'the grey hair and long ears,' which was meant to represent 'canitiem et longos annos;' 'long ears' recall to mind the picturesque 'long and hairy ear of a jackass' into which Carlyle professed his readiness to breathe his symptoms rather than to confide them to a doctor who chanced to be close at hand.

Similarity of sound not only causes confusion between Latin and English words, but also between English words that may be alike in sound, but differ in sense. The South Sea Bubble aimed at the abolition of the 'National Debt,' not of 'natural death.' Even financial ambition has its limits: 'universal aggravation' is not the phenomenon whose discovery is ascribed to Newton. 'Purple boots' differ from 'Papal bulls.' Cleopatra is not generally regarded as 'the patron saint of Ireland'—nor, indeed, as a saint at all. S. Patrick has some letters in common with her. Paris is popular in Arcady, Harris elsewhere; hence a young cockney copies down from dictation as material for a Latin verse: 'Young Harris was the shepherd's pride.'

Small boys may not be familiar with gems, but are even less familiar with monsters (excluding masters), and so a boy gravely says, 'Rough Sapphires danced.'

To vulgarise Paris is bad, to vulgarise Enoch Arden is worse. I am glad that I do not personally know the small boy who wrote, 'Enoch Arden was a simple sailor . . . a very simple sailor . . . ; he went away and thought his wife would be faithful, and when he came back he found a military-looking gentleman sitting in his favourite arm-chair.' Comment is needless, but the cane is not; alas! the cane is following the Dodo into chaos.

Students of Farrar's Greek Card will remember as interesting instances of the ethic dative a question about Celsus and a request about a door; one boy, as it were, rolled the two into one. Being asked for the English of 'quid mihi Celsus agit?' he gave instead, as answer to the question, 'he knocks me at this door.'

For the sake of Celsus' victim we may hope that the door was not decorated with 'brass handles,' which another boy gave as the English of 'æra, manus;' 'juxtaposition,' which the card declares to be the essence of the dative, was fatal to the hapless translator.

Being requested to comment on our old friend '*quo plus habent, eo plus cupiunt*,' one youth deepened the darkness of a dead language by the following statement: 'The transitive verbs *habeo*, *quo*, and *eo* are used intransitively, and take a dative of the object to which they refer.' This is hopeless: if that only (as a wise master has said) be a sentence where 'a combination of two or more words has some meaning,' then the excursus on *quo* is no sentence, it means nothing; so far from adding to our information, it threatens to rob us of reason. It combines the mystery of all the mystics with the irrelevance of Mr. F.'s aunt's remarks about the Dover road and Barnes' gander.

On reading these pages about 'things not generally known,' someone may object that there is too much Latin. Let it not be thought that this obsolescent tongue monopolises the shining hours of 'our boys;' science also is taught—or rather, to adopt language suited to sublime themes and speech days, is 'included in the curriculum.' Hence the following statement, which happily blends science and art, theory and practice, and shows the benefit of the experimental method: 'When carbon and oxygen combine, carbonic acid gas comes; its particular properties are that if you put it into soda-water it makes it fizzy.' Having been educated in the pre-scientific age, I know not if this be true; if it be, oh for a draught of carbonic acid gas if haply it might make this Paper fizzy!

